

# BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

Oscar Lowande's Great Bay State Shows toured in 1908. This poster was printed by the Donaldson Litho Company of Newport, Kentucky.

The same design had been used in 1905 by Barnum & Bailey for the La Famaille Brun Lecusson riding act. The Barnum poster was printed by Strobridge.

The original Lowande poster is in the Pfening Archives.

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## CORRECTION

New member No. 4019 Clayton Freiheit's name was misspelled in the May-June issue. Mr. Freiheit is director of the Denver, Colorado Zoo.

## ADDRESS CHANGES

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In America there has seldom been such a prolific family of equestrians as the Lowandes that spanned over a half century in originating and perfecting classic principal and somersault riding acts as well as hurdle acts. Although not at present a familiar name in circus equestrian circles, in 1905, for instance, there were approximately sixteen members of the Lowande family performing with bareback riding troupes on the largest and most popular shows in the United States. Dating from 1867, Lowandes appeared before the public for almost seven decades as fearless standing riders. A fifth generation member of the family is a current circus performer.<sup>1</sup>

There are unanswered questions concerning the origin of the family.<sup>2</sup> It is reputed that in 1867 Alexander Lowande, the fourth person with this name, travelled from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to Kingston, Jamaica with a Lowande Circus. This show had arrived in Havana by July 20th and and opened in Nassau in December of 1867. The cast of performers included Lowande's daughter, Clarinda, and his sons--Martinho, Natalio and Abelardo.

Alexander IV (1805?-1882) (Alexander, Sr.) was the patriarch, founder and early leader of this family of riders in the Americas. He was also the proprietor of Lowande's Brazilian Circus. Not only was his circus sometimes labeled Brazilian, but also he and members of his family for several generations were referred to at times as great Brazilian hurricane riders. This designation was used long after it was quite certain that many of these individuals had been born in the United States.

Some of the circuses that developed from the original Brazilian Circus of Alexander, Sr. might journey as far as Central and South America in almost any season of the year. Several members of the family died in South America and were buried there.

Of this family, Alexander, Sr. was apparently the first born in the United States. He was married three times. The children and their families from his second and third marriages constituted the great family of riders. From the second marriage these were Clarinda, Martinho (1839-1927), Abelardo (1852-1928), Natalio and Guilamena. The last one of this group married Menolo Gomez, a wealthy Cuban, and never came to the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Children of Alexander's third mar-

# THE LOWANDE Family of Riders

By John Daniel Draper

riage, the one to Virginia Guerin (1845-1903), were Romeo (who died at age four), Juliet (Julia) (1870-1961), Alexander, Jr. (A. G.) (-1958) and Cecil (1877-1940). The first wife of Martinho Lowande, Amelia Guerin (c-1841-1882), was a sister of Alexander, Sr.'s third wife, Virginia Guerin.<sup>4</sup> Five children of this marriage also became noted standing riders, namely Martinho, Jr., Marietta, Anthony (Tony), Alexander A. and Oscar.

Clarinda, Julia and Marietta all married notable circus standing riders and children from these marriages also continued in the profession.

In 1869 the transcontinental railroad was completed to California and Dan Castello's Circus & Menagerie travelled over a portion of that route, showing in

Clarinda Lowande as she appeared on the Adam Forepaugh Circus in the 1880s. Circus World Museum collection.



San Francisco from July 26th until August 22nd. With this show in California were Alexander and his four children. At that time all of them were trick or scenic riders. In later years Natalio was characterized as a general performer in acrobatic pursuits. On the California tour young Aberlardo also did vaulting and leaping to accompany his riding.

In 1870 the family, including the four children, appeared together on Siegrist's Great French Circus Combined with Lowande's Brazilian Circus and Van Amburgh Menagerie and in 1871 they were on the Adam Forepaugh Circus. The year 1873 found Martinho, the Brazilian bareback rider, with his wife and son, four year old Tony, and with brothers Natalio and Aberlardo on Don Philip Carforlena's Spanish Circus. His father was there.

For 1875 two circuses shared the allegiance of the family. Abelardo as a somersault rider, Clarinda as a bareback rider and their father with his own horses were on Sam Cole's Dominion Circus. That same year Natalio, Martinho and son Tony with their Imperial Brazilian Circus were on the P. T. Barnum Circus operated by John O'Brien. Martinho, born in South America, was billed as the wild rider of Brazil. His six year old son Tony was carried on his father's head in a riding act.

Aberlardo, aged twenty four, appeared on the West Coast with the Montgomery Queen Circus in 1876, where he was billed as a bareback rider (actually a pad rider) and a somersault equestrian.

The next year all of the family members, including seven year old Julia and five year old Marietta, were back on Lowande's Great Brazilian Circus. This circus permanently dissolved about the end of June in 1877. Almost all of the family including Alexander, Sr. then joined the Great U. S. Circus (Thayer & Noyes). On that show seventy nine year old Alexander was featured as the renowned Brazilian horse breaker. Later that year Aberlardo, Martino and Tony joined Cooper, Bailey & Company for the Australian tour.

Three years later Alexander died in Puerto Principe, Cuba. He was buried with Masonic honors in a local cemetery. He was survived by his wife and children who then either sought employment on a wide variety of circuses or after a while framed their own shows.



### Clarinda

In 1869 Clarinda Lowande, on the threshold of her teen years, appeared with her family in a series of balancing feats. She went on to become a notable equestrienne and in 1877 was called the peerless "Queen of the Arena." By 1881 she was billed as the Brazilian principal bareback equestrienne. Interestingly, this graceful, dashing and beautiful rider bore a trade mark of those times which was not surprising. She was functionally illiterate.<sup>5</sup>

Harry Lamkin, Jr. on the John Robinson Circus in 1900. Pfening Archives.

In the late 1870's Clarinda married Harry Lamkin (-1886). When Harry was only 15 years old, he had already launched his circus career and was practicing as a bareback rider. Eventually was principally an equilibrist, dancing barrel performer, leaper and tumbler. His marriage to Clarinda brought a number of circus riders to his Petersburg, Illinois home to winter, including Clarinda's half sister, Julia, and her brothers Alexander and Cecil and Harry's half brother Edward Shipp who was becoming a good rider under Harry's tutelage. These performers needed a place to train so Lamkin built a ring barn, which in turn brought more performers. Lamkin soon outgrew life in Petersburg and directed his activities to Central and South America where he eventually lost his life.

In 1882 Lamkin claimed to be the originator of various balancing acts such as the Enchanted Globes, Phantom Cross, Magic Barrel and Mysterious Tables. He also became a sensational four horse rider.

Their son, Harry Lamkin, Jr., was born on July 27, 1879. He became an accomplished principal, manege and jockey rider in circus performances.

For a number of years Clarinda appeared with her half sister, principal rider Julia Lowande, with hurdle rider Ed Shipp and with her son, Harry Lamkin, Jr., on a number of shows such as Adam Forepaugh Circus (1881), Big U. S. Circus (1882), Ed Shipp's Midwinter Circus at Petersburg (1884), Older, Crane & Co.



(1884), Lamkin & Shipp Circus in Panama and San Jose (1885) and on Gardner, Lamkin & Donovan American Circus Co. in Trinidad and Panama (1885-1886). Harry Lamkin, Sr., a proprietor of this show, died at Colon, Panama of yellow fever on February 25, 1886. After his death, Clarinda returned to Petersburg and continued performing intermittently with Julia and her husband Ed Shipp.

On October 6, 1888 she remarried in the arena of Ringling Bros. Circus at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. The bridegroom was Joseph Parson. Present as witnesses were, among others, Ed Shipp, Al Ringling and his wife Lou. In that year Mrs. Al Ringling was a rider on the show and only the week before she had been injured in a fall from her horse. Joe Parson and his brothers had previously operated circuses of their own (1879-1883) on which Al Ringling was a performer.

Joe Parson rode a principal act and a great hurricane hurdle act on Ringling Bros. Circus in 1887. His contract for that year stated that for \$10 per week he was to do a high wire act, a riding act and an outside ascension as well as to make himself generally useful. Now, with his new wife, he continued on Ringling Bros. in 1889 as a hurdle and four horse rider. Both of them finished that season on George W. Richard's Southern Circus. Clarinda was on Ringling Bros. Circus again in 1890 along with appearing on Charles Bartine's Circus. In 1892 Clarinda and Joe were on Gollmar Bros., she in a principal riding act and he in a four horse act, a principal act, a two horse carrying act and in hurdle riding.

The last reference to Clarinda and Joe was found for January and March of 1895 when they were on Shipp's Midwinter Circus at Petersburg and later Peoria, Illinois. Shipp was then the proprietor of a larger ring barn in Petersburg which after 1890 replaced the original one. Appearing in Petersburg with Clarinda and her husband was her son Harry. Joe Parson continued as a four horse rider in addition to serving as equestrian director of the show. Joe Parson died later that year.

At age of six Harry Lamkin, Jr. began practicing in the old ring barn in Petersburg and was able to stand on a horse with the aid of a riding mechanic.

In his early practice in somersaulting over horses he quite often landed on his back on a pile of sawdust. By 1890 he had made much progress in developing his phenomenal skill as a standing rider. In July of that year, when his mother was incapacitated with an injury, he went into the ring for the first time as a performer and in December of 1893 Master Harry Lamkin appeared at the opening of the New Amphitheater (ring barn) in Petersburg. During his teen years he was on a succession of shows; Gollmar Bros (1892), Dick Sutton's Uncle Tom Cabin Shows (1893), Sells & Renfrow's Circus, Andy McDonald's Circus (1896) and Col. George W. Hall's Circus in Mexico. He returned from Mexico in 1899.

He then became an equestrian on the John Robinson Circus (1900-1901, 1907), on Great Wallace Shows (1902-1903) and on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. (1904-1906). He was on Campbell Bros. in 1909 and was in Europe (1910-1916) where he closed his career.

Harry's statuary and posing act in 1900, while on horseback with Blanche Hilliard, was a real innovation. She did a two horse carrying act using Harry as top mounter. Old timers on the show said that it was the first instance they could remember of a lady carrying a man on her shoulders in a riding act. This presentation preceded by several years a similar act by Fred Derrick and Ella Bradna on the Barnum & Bailey Circus. Harry developed into a hurdle rider and principal bareback somersault rider as well as a jockey rider. He also was a fine saddle horse rider. In 1903 he participated in an artistic and graceful new double trotting act with Winnie Sweeney and in 1906 Harry rode with the best--at that time Oscar and Martinho Lowande, Jr.--in one of three principal bareback acts. John Correia, the husband of his cousin, Marietta Lowande, was his ringmaster.

Harry Lamkin, Jr. at one time was married to Pearl Robinson, a niece of John F. Robinson.

### Julia Lowande (1870-1961)

Mention has already been made of Julia Lowande and her husband Edward Shipp (1864-1939). An interesting family relationship existed among them and Clarinda and her husband, Harry Lamkin, Sr. Ed Shipp and Harry were half brothers, their mother being Parthena Jane McHenry, who was first married to Greene Lamkin and next to Rolla Shipp. In the same way Clarinda and Julia (ac-





Julia Lowadne in 1885. Circus World Museum collection.

tually Juliet) had the same father, Alexander Lowande IV. They were the children of his second and third wives.

Julia was almost exclusively a principal bareback rider although she did some limited work on the revolving globe, for instance in 1907 on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus. Debuting at the early age of 6, she performed regularly on various shows until at least the 1910 season on Barnum & Bailey (See Table I).

Her marriage to Edward Shipp took place on February 21, 1889 at Philadelphia.

As a principal rider, Julia appeared opposite a number of outstanding circus riders. In 1887 she was with Daisy Belmont and was also one of five girls in the wild west. In 1891 she rode with Josie Ashton. In 1895 she was in a trio with Elena Ryland and Marion Leslie. Also on the same bill that year was Cecil Lowande, her brother. Again in 1899 she was paired with Elena Ryland, in 1901 with Lizzie Rooney, and in 1903 with Nellie Ryland. In the years before 1895 she rode in the same performances with both her half sister, Clarinda, and her husband, Ed. Shipp.

Julia, in a 1906 interview while she was travelling with the Carl Hagenbeck Greater Shows, gave a very interesting account of her life with the circus: "I commenced trouping when I was a mere girl . . . and I expect to continue until I grow old and wrinkled. You see my husband was a circus man when I met him and he was such a handsome, dashing circus man that I

fell in love with him and I have never fallen out.

"But you did not ask me about love and marriage but rather whether we women of the circus have what is called a hard time. I answer with an emphatic 'No' and I feel sure I echo the sentiment of every woman in the profession. Of course, we have work but then you know nearly every woman has something to do. If it is not household tasks, it is in the business world.

"The work I do in the circus is like play to me and it is a great pleasure, too. I have my horses to ride and as I simply dote on them, you can imagine that I go through with my task in a very light manner. Of course, we work in fair weather and foul and often when it is stormy I am compelled to wade through mud and water, but I take the good with the bad.

"We live splendidly with the circus. Mr. Hagenbeck's managers take exceptionally good care of the women. We have staterooms and clean, airy berths in beautiful Pullman sleepers with porters to look after our laundry, brush our shoes and skirts and keep our beds supplied with fresh linen. And our husbands, of course, get the benefit of all these luxuries.

"We are not compelled to rise early like the workmen. If we are out of the cars by nine o'clock and reach the circus grounds a half hour later, we have plenty of time to slip into our parade costumes and be in readiness when Mr. Shipp, our equestrian director, calls 'Mount.' After parade, we change into street costume and I have luncheon in the dining tents. And we have splendid things to eat, served admirably in the cleanest of tents.

"The afternoon performance does not commence until 2 o'clock and we have plenty of time for social chats and sewing parties. A few of us carry little hand sewing machines in our wardrobe trunks. We get them out and sew and gossip just like the women do at church sewing societies--until it comes time to dress for our acts. Then the time passes quickly and almost before we know it, the show is over and most of us slip down into the city to shop.

"Dinner is served on the grounds from four until six o'clock and then we have two hours before the night show commences. Many of us utilize this time in practicing our acts. We are through, our trunks are packed and we are in the cars shortly after eleven--to either read, sew, talk or

to go to bed. We never keep the shockingly late hours of the society matrons and the fact that we live almost entirely in the open air makes us strong and healthy. In fact, instead of being dyspeptic and irritable, we find life worth living and we are cheerful.

"Sundays, if we have a long run . . . we visit with each other in the various cars and have a good social time. It is just like visiting neighbors. If our train reaches town early on Sunday, the majority of us go to church. . . . Yes, lots of circus folks go to church."

Julia was a very vivacious, attractive blond. At the beginning of the 1908 season when she was on Barnum & Bailey, she was interviewed by a reporter from *Leslie's Weekly*. She was then a pretty little woman in the unconventional costume of a street dress tucked up around her waist until shortened to riding length. So adorned she jumped onto the back of a galloping horse and posed for a second on the tip of her toes while her husband smiled approvingly and suggested other poses.

Edward Shipp learned his principal riding from his half brother, Harry Lamkin. He was a good bareback rider as well as a hurdle rider, a bounding jockey rider and a four and six horse rider until he broke his leg in 1895 during a ring performance on Ringling Bros. Circus. This accident brought his riding career to a close (See Table II).

In 1896 he became an assistant equestrian director on Ringling Bros. Circus, a position he held through the 1902 season. He then served as equestrian director on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus (1903-1905, 1907), on Carl Hagenbeck Circus (1906) and on Barnum & Bailey Circus (1908-1910).

Edward Shipp, assistant equestrian director of Ringling Bros. in 1897. Pfening Archives.



In the meanwhile he operated Shipp's Winter Circus at Petersburg in the old ring barn from about 1887 through 1890 and then in the new ring barn until at least 1905. It was there on February 22, 1898 that the great clown, Frank "Slivers" Oakley first tried out his burlesque female principal riding act. In February of 1901 Shipp's Indoor Circus was showing at Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In addition to Edward Shipp, who was owner and manag-



er, a number of family members were on the show. There were Julia Lowande as principal equestrienne, her brother Cecil in a somersault riding act, another brother Alex, Jr. in the bounding rope and mule hurdle act as well as Harry Lamkin, Jr. as a hurdle rider. Frank Oakley was the principal clown. In 1907 Edward Shipp became a partner with Roy Feltus in the Shipp and Feltus Circus that operated in Central and South America from 1907 to 1923. In the early years of their association, their circus was out only during the winter season. In 1923 it had just concluded a three year tour at Kingston, Jamaica. In 1930 Circo Shipp sailed from New York City for yet another South American tour, this one again for a duration of three years.

During 1901 and 1902 when Edward and Julia were on Ringling Bros. they received a total combined salary of \$75 per week for seasons that would run, for instance, from April 17th to November 15th.

In August of 1939 Edward Shipp was retired, living in Santiago, Chile with his wife and his daughter. At that time Feltus was residing in Bloomington, Indiana where he operated a poster advertising plant.

Shipp died six years later at his residence in New York City and Julia died at age 91 in 1961. Both were buried in their old home town of Petersburg. Their daughter Virginia was a manege rider on Shipp & Feltus Circus in 1921 and on Circo Shipp in 1930 in Trinidad, West Indies.

#### Martinho Lowande (1839-1927)

Martinho, Clarinda's eldest brother, not only was a great equestrian performer, horse trainer and a successful circus proprietor but also was the parent of five children--Anthony known as Tony (1869-1937), Marietta (1872-1962), Alexander A., Oscar, Sr. (1877-1956) and Martinho, Jr. (-1931)--all of whom excelled in equestrian feats. He was married twice, first to Amelia Guerin (-1881) and later to Rosina, whom he divorced in 1889. Martinho was born in Brazil and was often referred to as the hurricane horseman of Brazil and the Great Lowande. His collection of acts was often called Martinho Lowande's Brazilian Circus.

As early as 1868 he was second to none with his wonderful principal bareback riding and somersaults. His circus career was very long, extending to at least 1920. In 1869 he was somersaulting over nine horses and by 1873 he had brought his infant son, Tony the Centaur, into his carrying act. Also appearing with him in 1873 were his wife and his brothers Natalio

and Abelardo. Martinho soon became legendary on the hippodrome track with his original and terrific four and seven horse acts. In 1878 his electrifying act was styled as the "Flight of Whirlwind" as he rode, drove and handled seven horses all at the same time.

Martinho's second wife, Rosina, performed in a double equestrian act with her husband and in addition she was a hurdle rider. She was also an artist on the slack wire and the trapeze.

On the O'Brien Circus in 1885 the Lowandes were in the center of a controversy when an apprentice, Clara Hamilton, ran away from them in Philadelphia to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children because of alleged ill treatment. Three years later at Frankford, Pennsylvania Martinho had an Australian lad, Richard Spain, in training with him as a bareback rider.

Martinho signed a contract in September of 1877 for a one year tour of Australia and New Zealand with Cooper, Bailey & Co. for the season of 1878. As a bareback rider he was to do wonderful and thrilling feats assisted by his dauntless sons, Tony and Martinho, Jr. His salary was fixed at \$300 per week in American gold or its equivalent. The show also provided food and accommodations for himself, his horse and groom. Lowande had to furnish eight horses as well as the groom. His two young sons accompanied him to appear in his presentation which consisted of a double bareback carrying act and the hurricane four and seven horse hippodrome acts.

In 1889 there were references to both Oscar, Sr. and Martinho, Jr. appearing with their father. Martinho, Jr. at that time was described as a principal bareback rider who did pirouettes and also back and forward somersaults. In addition, he presented a trick pony and a riding dog.

Over the years, Martinho, Sr. also served as equestrian director (1871-1877, 1884), manager (1886-1887, 1889) and proprietor (1881, 1883, 1888) on various circuses (See Table III).

In 1920 Martinho, Jr. had his own Lowande's All American Show in Puerto Rico and Cuba. At that time on that show his father, Martinho, Sr. at age 81 was still doing his 4



Shipp & Feltus circus building in Buenos Aires in 1919. Pfening Archives.

horse act. Martinho, Sr. died in Havana on September 8, 1927 from the infirmities of old age and was buried there. All his five children survived him.

#### Tony Lowande (1869-1937)

Anthony Lowande, the eldest of Martinho's children, rode in a carrying act with his father, "The Great Lowande," as "La Petit Tony" until he was about eight years of age. In 1887 he did a somersault pad act and four and six horse riding acts similar to those made famous by his father. On numerous occasions it was stated that he was a principal somersault bareback rider, the youngest in the business, in

Tony Lowande on Walter L. Main in 1898. Circus World Museum collection.







Circo Tony Lowande in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1912. Pfening Archives.

fact. Since at that time a great emphasis was placed on the distinction between bareback and pad riders, it is probably correct to assume that he had discarded the pad and was now performing a bareback act.

On Adam Forepaugh Circus in 1889 he was paired with Orrin Hollis in somersault bareback riding acts and with Charles Watson in four horse riding. It was at this time that out of admiration for his aunt, Julia, who was actually one year younger, he gave her an elegant pair of diamond ear rings.

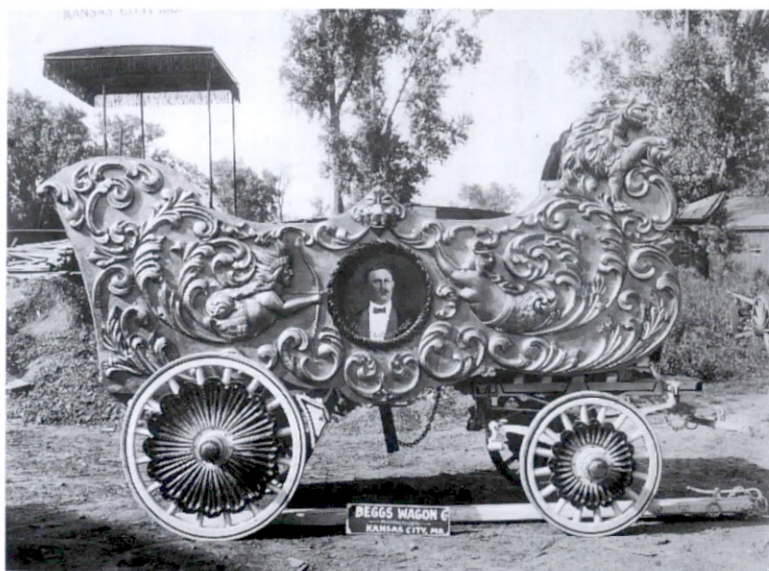
In November of 1892 while on Walter L. Main Circus at Hot Springs, Arkansas he broke his right leg while doing a jump up on his horse. After recovering from this injury he continued his riding and the next year took his Tony Lowande's Great American Circus to Cuba. He remained there through 1895. While in Cuba he introduced his six thoroughbred Rob Roy horses, which he rode and drove in a thrilling fashion. He had performed in Cuba earlier (1888, 1890) on Gran Circo Pubillones as well as in Mexico on Orrin Bros. (1885).

In 1896 on the Walter L. Main Circus he did a carrying act with his sister, Mrs. Marietta Correia, on two horses. Two years later on the same show his wife Josephine was in the carrying act with him. In 1901 on the Tony Lowande Circus in Cuba Josie was a principal rider. She was also advertised as a rider on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. heralds in 1902 and 1903.

The July 2, 1904 New York *Clipper* gives a good idea of Tony Lowande's American Circus in Cuba. "Our tent is a 100 foot round top with a fifty and a forty and a two pole dressing room. The ten heavy wagons that came down with us have held up through wet and dry weather. Most of the performers are American, and of course it is run on the American plan, having our own horses, wagons and trains. The lions and elephants have proved great drawing cards." The article then listed some two dozen performers and acts including Mr. and Mrs. Lowande as riders.

The last mention of Tony's principal somersault riding was on J. H. La Pearl's Great Railroad Shows in 1899 where he also served as equestrian director. After that time he was actively engaged in the management of his various circus enterprises in Central and

This bandwagon built by the Beggs Wagon Company was shipped to the Tony Lowande Circus in Buenos Aires. Pfening Archives.



South America until the time of his death in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1937. However, in 1912 on the Grand Equestrian Co. (Frank Brown) & Zoological Exposition of Tony Lowande he did a Roman riding act on four horses (See Table IV).

He always valued the appeal of equestrian acts as is evidenced by his purchase in 1903 of Mons. Fleurrott's troop of eight performing stallions in Havana. This was at the time that he bought out Donovan and Chapman's circus outfit.

In 1921 it was reputed that Tony Lowande's Circus was the largest show up to that time to play in South America. It operated under canvas and featured a street parade with an ornate bandwagon with eight horse hitch and also camels and elephants.

At the time of his death Tony was leasing extensive animal displays to the leading circuses of South America. Although Tony's burial was in Sao Paulo, his brother, the Rev. Alexander A. Lowande, officiated at memorial services for him at the Union M. E. Church in New York City under the auspices of the United Spanish War Veterans.

#### Alexander A. Lowande

This son of Martinho Lowande, Sr., who eventually became a Christian minister and chaplain of the National Variety Artists, also started early in his life to be a circus performer. He is not to be confused with his uncle, Alexander G. Lowande, who was an equestrian performer. In 1883 on Martinho Lowande's Brazilian Circus, Master Alexander A. Lowande was an acrobat. By 1896 on Howe's London Shows he did a hurdle act and two and four horse riding.

Later on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. (1903), on Ringling Bros. (1904-1905) and on Barnum & Bailey (1908) he achieved great success with his rough riding and Roman standing acts. In 1908, for instance, he rode upside down, picking up articles from the ground and doing mounts and dismounts while the horse ran at full speed. In 1911 he was a rough rider on Sig Sautelle's Circus in which his brother Oscar had a financial interest. Alexander's wife, Matilda, was wardrobe mistress on that circus.

In 1920 and 1921 in the



same tradition as most of the other family members, Alexander became a circus proprietor as a partner with his brother Oscar in Lowande Bros. Circus, which went to Puerto Rico. This show formerly had been the Lowande and Gardner Circus. A son, Howard A. Lowande, was with his father and mother on this show.

During the winter of 1922-23 Alexander was again in Central and South America as co-owner with Oscar of a circus. See Table V for more information concerning Alexander A. Lowande's circus activities.



The Martinho Lowande riding act on Al G. Barnes in 1927. Pfening Archives.

### Martinho Lowande, Jr. (-1931)

As a child performer with his father, Martinho Lowande, Jr.'s early career closely paralleled that of his brother Tony. This phase continued from 1874 until about 1890 on a variety of shows: L. B. Lent (1874), Cooper, Bailey and Co. in Australia and New Zealand (1877-1878), Lowande's Brazilian Circus (1883, 1889), Orrin Bros. in Mexico (1885), John E. Heffron's Great Eastern Show (1889) and James Donovan & Co. in South America (1890).

As a boy principal bareback rider, in his routines he included pirouettes and backward and forward somersaults. He also presented a trick pony and a riding dog. In 1895 on his brother's show, Tony Lowande Circus in Cuba, he performed a two horse carrying act and a four horse riding act in addition to his somersault riding.

He had a long season in 1898 with Newsom's Circus in England before opening with J. H. Cook in Scotland. On the Walter L. Main Circus in 1899, true to family tradition, he was labeled the Brazilian horseman. After another year (1901) on Tony Lowande's Circus in Havana as principal bareback somersault rider, Martinho, Jr. joined the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus for several seasons (1902-1903, 1905-1907). There in 1902 he participated in a very remarkable feat with his brother Oscar, as well as with Sam Bennett and Fred Ledget. As the finale to some grand jockey riding, the four of them simultaneously did a jump-up to a standing position on a single horse as it circled the ring.

Already a celebrated somersault rider, in 1904 Martinho, Jr. was practicing a really new and novel style of somersaults on the Walter L. Main Circus.

About this time a tally-ho acrobatic

equestrian act was initiated with the so-called "Eight Lowandes." It was named the "Coaching Party Going to the Races." In 1905 this presentation was entitled the "8 O'Briens on Derby Day." The cabriolet type of carriage was usually pulled by four white horses. Stella, Martinho, Jr.'s wife, was sometimes on the driver's box. Others riding in the vehicle might be Oscar Lowande and his wife Mamie, Marietta Lowande Correia, his sister, and her son, John Correia, Jr. In one pose Martinho, Jr. stood on the shoulders of Oscar. In a more daring presentation, both Oscar and Martinho, Jr. stood one behind the other, as John Correia, Jr., their nephew, did a backward somersault from the shoulders of one to the other. All of this was done while the carriage was in motion. In 1910 this feat was described as "daring run riot" and in that year was a feature on the show. This driving act, sometimes directed by Martinho, Jr. and sometimes by Oscar, was presented on a variety of shows: Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. (1905-1907), Boston Hippodrome (1908), John Robinson Circus (1910), Sig Sautelle Circus (1911-1913), Hagenbeck-Wallace (1916) and Sautelle & Lowande Monster Motor Truck Circus (1917). Meanwhile, Martinho, Jr. experimented with comedy riding in a Pete Jenkins act in 1911 on the Sig Sautelle Circus.

The Martinho Lowande, Jr. Circus, with a 100 foot round top with a 40 foot middle big top and 6 cages of wild animals, sailed to the West Indies in 1919 and continued through Central America and South America and then back to Puerto Rico and Cuba.

After clowning on Golden Bros. Circus in 1923, Martinho moved to the Al G. Barnes Circus in 1925 and the next year on that show he produced a riding act

with comedy. In addition to himself, it included Jennie Miller, Betty Kenyon, Shinnie Sunbury and Jack McAfee. At that time Martinho also rode a principal act. The "family" act continued on Al G. Barnes in 1927 with Margaret Graham joining his troupe, which included Jack McAfee in comedy as well as Bertha Conrad, Anna Velde and Dixie Whittaker.

Two years later his comedy riding group was seen at fairs and celebrations on the West Coast. It then included four girls and three men and opened with four

horses and two carrying teams. There were also a seven person fork jump to one horse and a fast finish horse with jump-ups from the ground.

In 1930 Martinho, Jr. clowning on Al G. Barnes and on the Los Angeles Al Malaikah Temple Shrine Circus. While a member of clown alley on Al G. Barnes in 1931, he died of plural pneumonia at Sacramento, California on May 16th. True to the spirit of circus tradition until the very end, his memorial services were held in the Al G. Barnes dining tent at Roseburg, Oregon with all employees of the show attending. Charles Redrick's band rendered appropriate musical selections during the services.

### Marietta Lowande Correia (1871-1962)

Among the children of Martinho Lowande, Sr. who were circus equestrians, Marietta was the only daughter. At the age of five she appeared on Lowande's Great Brazilian Circus. Performing hurricane hurdles in her teens, she was hailed as the current "Empress of the Arena." During much of the decade beginning in 1889 she appeared on Walter L. Main Circus (1889-1890, 1892-1893, 1896). In the next twelve years she performed for six seasons on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus (1899-1901, 1904, 1906, 1911). At age seventeen Marietta rode in a two horse carrying act with her eleven year old brother Oscar. Seven years later she performed the same act with her brother Tony.

On October 27, 1888 she married John Correia. Senor Correia's specialty was the cloud swing, which he performed at the turn of the century on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Later he was ringmaster for the principal riding acts of Martinho Lowande, Jr.,



Oscar Lowande and Harry Lamkin.

From the marriage of Marietta and John (-1907) there were three children, who became riders: John, Jr. (1889-), Edward (1892-1977) and Amelia (1894-1972).

Madame Marietta Correia did a carrying act with her daughter Amelia on Gollmar Bros. in 1910. In the account book of that show their salary was listed as \$125 per week for a season's total income of \$3,416.65. The following year on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. she rode a double jockey act with John, Jr. in addition to a principal bareback act. In 1913 on Gollmar Bros. she and Amelia were listed as the Correia Sisters, Spanish equestriennes.

For a number of years she rode principal acts, sometimes opposite such stars as Josie Ashton (1900), Carrie Rooney (1911) and Edith Castello (1911).

As was the case with most of the Lowandes, Marietta performed in Cuba, Central and South America on various occasions: Martinho Lowande's Brazilian Circus (1877, 1881, 1887-1888), James Donovan & Co. (1890), Tony Lowande Circus (1893-1894, 1902).

#### **John Correia, Jr., Edward Correia, Amelia Correia Nelson**

John's early career was on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus (1899-1901) as both a tight wire and slack rope equilibrist as well as an aerialist. In 1910 he rode a principal act on Gollmar Bros. and in 1911 on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. he was one of three male principal bareback somersault riders. This was also the year he appeared with his mother in a double jockey act.

On the Sig Sautelle Circus in 1912, one of the years that his uncle Oscar was a co-proprietor, he performed a carrying act with Miss Cannon. A rather singular photo was taken in 1913 as he did a backward somersault from the back of one horse to the back of a second one running in tandem. He was then becoming recognized as a coming bareback equestrian of note.

From 1917-1922 and again in 1925 he was on Ringling Bros. Circus and later Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows. In the 1917 contract of the McCree-Davenport Troupe, he was listed as a member of a comedy riding act which included Lulu Davenport McCree, Effie Davenport McDonald, Nettie Greer and Tony Parker. Other offer-



Amelia Correia on R. T. Richards Circus in 1917. Pfening Archives.

ings by this troupe were two lady principal riding acts, one male principal act and a five member jockey act. The total salary was \$275 per week. This was the first season for that troupe after the sudden death on the Ringling Show of Reno McCree, Sr. during the previous summer.

In 1920 John Correia, Jr. was in the Clark's riding act and in the next year his wife Ruth rode with him. John Agee's All Star Circus of 1922 listed both Johnny Correia and Percy Clarke as bareback riders. The New York Hippodrome in the winter of 1924-25 presented the Riding Rooneys with five horses and six people including Johnny Correia, premier rider of the universe. After a time with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1925, he joined the Frank J. McIntyre Circus, where he

John and Amelia Correia on John Robinson Circus in 1929. Pfening Archives.



was featured as a somersault rider with the Riding Waltons. This act also included Edith Castello.

Both Robbins Bros. Circus and John Robinson Circus claimed the talents of Johnny and Ruth Correia in 1927. He had a comedy riding act opposite the Riding Crandalls on Robbins Bros. Circus and opposite the Rudynoffs on the John Robinson Circus. Ruth was also in the big twenty eight member manege act on the latter show.

Bessie Castello, Effie Davenport, John Correia and his wife, who were on John Robinson's for 1928, joined Sells Floto for 1930, a few days before the end of the Chicago Stadium date. In that year Ruby Orton was a member of the Correia riding act.

In 1929 Ruth Correia was on Robbins Bros. for part of the season in the Joe Hodgini family comedy riding act. That same year she was also a principal rider and a manege rider on the John Robinson Circus.

While no further references have been found for Johnny Correia, it is recorded that Ruth Correia was with Mack Hale Bros. in 1931 as a principal rider and on the swinging ladder.

Edward and his wife, Ruby Osborne, were riders on Gollmar Bros. Circus in 1913, the last of the two years (1910, 1913) that his mother, Marietta, and sister, Amelia, were also there. In that year Edward and Ruby received \$20 a week for a total combined income of \$492.35 for the season from May 4 until October 11.

Amelia Correia began her circus career in 1899 with the Jackson Family of bicyclists. Later she was a principal rider on Gollmar Bros. Circus (1910, 1913), on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus (1911) and on R. T. Richards Circus (1917).

#### **Oscar Lowande (1877-1956)**

Oscar was perhaps the most remarkable member of the great Lowande family. He was a prominent equestrian performer who pioneered in the more intricate styles of somersault and jockey riding. His wife, Mamie Galvin (1877-1960), was also an admirable equestrian performer. Their two children Oscar, Jr. and Elsie Mae were thrilling riders and entertainers.

Beginning in 1881, Oscar had a long circus career of seventy two years. He was sometimes referred to as the "Star of the Southern Hemisphere." He became a bareback somersault rider of excellence, reputedly being the first, at least in public, to



perform a horse to horse somersault on two bareback horses running in tandem. This feat was accomplished in 1902 on Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Previously he had thrown backward and forward somersaults while doing principal riding and was a four horse rider on Sanger & Lent Circus (1896). In 1897 on the Great Wallace Shows he was a bounding jockey rider, did a carrying act with Olga Reed and participated with seven others in a bareback somersault act that featured a tallyho. At the Great Wallace quarters in 1898 he did a somersault, landing on one foot, and a lay out somersault, both on a galloping horse. In 1899 he joined Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus where he remained through 1907.

In 1900 with Miss Meers he did a heroic bounding jockey act on two horses. They both did forward and backward leaps from the ground to the horses' backs, concluding with thrilling double leaps to the back of a single horse. The next year, after a superb exhibition of double jockey horsemanship with A. M. Davenport, there was a startling finale when these two were joined by Fred Ledgett and Sam Bennett as the four riders leaped simultaneously from the ground to a standing position on the back of a rapidly running horse.

By 1902, in addition to the horse to horse somersault Oscar and his wife performed a classic *pas de deux* carrying act. In 1903 and 1904 he claimed a somersault from horse to horse to horse, the three horses running in tandem. He was by then considered to be in the same class as James Robinson when Robinson was at his best. In addition, with his wife he performed the scenic "Flight of Inca & His Bride" and Mamie also did a principal riding act.

In true family tradition, in 1904 Oscar with his brother, Martinho, Jr., and with Cecil and Alex G. Lowande, took out the Lowande Bros. Circus from Petersburg, Illinois.

Oscar Lowande was on the Boston Hippodrome Circus in 1908. That year, with William Sims and William Jamerson, he did in private but before witnesses some really remarkable tricks. In one, he reportedly somersaulted from the shoulders of one man to those of another while the two men were standing on bareback horses running in tandem.

During the summer of 1908 he oper-



Oscar and Mamie Lowande on Forepaugh-Sells in 1899. Pfening Archives.

ated the Oscar Lowande Bay States Circus. Reference of this circus appeared in the May 23, 1908 New York *Clipper*.

Performing on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus under canvas in 1910 in New York City, Oscar and Mamie wore their showy red knickerbockers as they went through their intricate routines. They showed the highest perfection in vaulting and jockey riding and in their carrying act. Their leaps and their principal and double riding ran on a clockwork schedule. Then it was the ladies' turn with their short riding skirts in principal riding that offered a novel assortment of leaps, jumps, mounts and dismounts. The trio of equestriennes consisted of Mamie dressed in orange, Marie Meers in red and Carrie Rooney in crimson.

For this season of 1910, the Lowande contract called for a salary of \$125 per week. Oscar was required to do a principal riding somersault act and Mamie a principal riding act. In addition, they were to present a double jockey act. It was further stipulated that the Lowandes were to furnish the horses for these designated acts and that both were to appear in the daily street parade and in the tournament entry.

Over the years Oscar Lowande was involved with a number of other circuses in a variety of capacities: Lowande Bros. Circus (1904) co-proprietor with Martinho, Jr., Cecil, and A. G. Lowande; Oscar Lowande Circus (1909); Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus (1910); and Sig Sautelle' Circus (1911-1914, 1919) performer, equestrian director and co-owner. In 1914 Sig Sautelle bought out the interest of his two partners, Oscar Lowande and G. W. Rollins. The Sig Sautelle Nine Big Shows remained an

18 car show but the profits were simply not large enough to share among three co-proprietors.

The next year was the first of three for Oscar Lowande on Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus (1915-1916, 1918) and in 1917 he was again a partner with Sig Sautelle on the Sautelle & Lowande Circus. On this show he and his wife were principal riders and they also did a two horse carrying act. Also, the "Eight Lowandes" were in the tallyho act. Other circuses in which he appeared were the Lowande Show in South America in 1920 and the

Lowande Bros. Circus in Cuba in 1926. In 1926 at the Cincinnati Shrine Circus the trio, Fred Derrick, Poodles Hanneford and Oscar, rode straight principal acts, that is, without comedy.

Mamie Lowande was a member of the Joe Hodgini Troupe of riders in 1925 on the Rogers & Harris Circus.

Oscar Lowande once commented about his contentment with his strenuous life on the circus: "I don't think it [bareback riding] is dangerous. Personally, I am more afraid when I am trying to cross the crowded streets of Boston than I am when upon the back of a bucking horse in the sawdust ring and, honestly, I believe there is more real danger in driving a team or operating a motor car through the streets of a city than there is performing in the circus.

"I have been hurt several times, but never seriously injured, yet I have been riding since I was five years old and have been performing difficult acrobatic feats daily during that time. Life with the circus is what you make it—it is the same whatever you may be engaged in. It is true that I know of no other life—I am satisfied with it, am happy and consequently have nothing to fret about."

In the winter months, Oscar sometimes relaxed at his residence in Reading, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. There he maintained a ring barn as early as 1906 with a regulation circus ring where he could practice and try out new ideas during the off season as well as present circus performances.

By 1935 at the age of fifty eight Oscar Lowande took up clowning, which he did for the next eighteen years. He was on Bob Morton Circus, Al. G. Barnes Circus and James Bell Circus, all in 1936, Barnes-Carruthers Circus (1941), Walter L. Main Circus (1941), spot dates (1942), Charles Hunt Show





Oscar and Mamie Lowande in 1915. Circus World Museum collection.

(1944), Sparks Circus (1946), Orrin Davenport Circus (1950), Aladdin Shrine Circus in Columbus, Ohio (1952).

In 1953 Oscar Lowande retired after a professional life that dated from 1881. It is a bit sad to realize that few if any who saw him clowning on Sparks Circus in 1946, for instance, would have known or appreciated the great riding that he had done at the turn of the century.

#### Oscar Lowande, Jr. (1902-1984)

By the time he was fifteen years old, Oscar, Jr. had launched himself into the circus on the Sautelle & Lowande Circus as a principal rider. Also in that year he was on the Pantages Theater Circuit with "The Topsy Turvey Riders," which included his father and mother as well as his sister Elsie Mae, and the Cuban clown Edward Deime performing on three horses.

In 1923 he began appearing in the Poodles Hanneford act at fairs and vaudeville. He continued with that act in 1926 and 1927 as a bounding jockey rider when it went over to Sells-Floto Circus. The next year these performers opened at the Winter Garden in New York City with the Circus Princess Co. This production ran for 28 weeks. After that engagement Oscar entered the motion picture business and worked with Joe E. Brown and Frankee Darro in *The Circus Kid*. He also appeared in movie comedies with Poodles Hanneford. In 1928 he was with the Poodles Hanneford Troupe in the prologue of live circus acts on the stage at Grau-

man's Chinese Theater in Hollywood when Charlie Chaplin's *The Circus* was shown.

During 1933 and 1934 Oscar, Jr. was a member of the George Hanneford riders on Downie Bros. Circus. Isabel McCree was also a member of that troupe in 1934. In 1935 he was a bareback rider in the Bernetti Troupe on the Al G. Barnes Circus.

Oscar's sister Elsie Mae (1899-1987) was a member of the riding act with her father, mother and brother on the 1916 Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Four years later she travelled with the Lowande and Gardner Circus to Puerto Rico and in 1925 she became the bride of Francis J. Collins.

#### Aberlardo (1852-1928) and Josephine Lowande (1864-1929)

Aberlardo, of the same generation as Clarinda and Martinho, Sr., has sometimes been recorded as an adopted son of Alexander IV. However, much confusion is introduced by the certificate and record of his death, filed by his daughter, Matilda. First of all she listed him as the son of Martinho. He could not be Martinho's son since he was only 13 years younger than Martinho. Also, Matilda had the feeling that everything associated with the circus was demeaning so she endeavored to eliminate all references to the associations that her father had had with the circus. Since, in his years of retirement, Abelardo had lived on a small farm near Middlesex, New Jersey, on the certificate she listed his occupation as a retired farmer. His birthplace was recorded as Sao Paulo, Brazil which was probably correct. References in the literature indicate that Abelardo was active as a somersault rider from at least 1869 until 1895. His wife Josephine began to appear with him in riding acts around 1882. From their marriage there was a total of eight sons and daughters.

In the earliest accounts of his career, young Abelardo's picturesque somersault riding was punctuated with vaulting and thrilling leaps. As one of the real circus pioneers travelling to California in 1869, he was on Dan Castello's Great Overland Circus and Menagerie, From the Atlantic to the Pacific (Nixon, Howes & Castello, proprietors, James H. Nixon, director). In the billing for Santa Cruz, California for Monday, October 11, 1869 there was a prominent place for The Brazilian Family of Sig. Alexander Lowanda (sic), comprising Martin (Martinho), the astounding Bareback Rider; Clorinda (Clarinda), The Graceful and Dashing; Abalando (Aberlardo), the Boy Wonder; and Natila (Natalio), Trick and Scenic

Rider. Note the careless spelling of the family names in the ad.

On a herald for Montgomery Queen's Circus of 1876 we get a fairly detailed description of Aberlardo's equestrian artistry. He was a rider par excellent who was the "South American Prince and Wild Rider of Brazil. [He does] terrific double pirouettes and matchless somersault riding, recognized as one of the most fearless, reckless and yet graceful riders in the show world. [He] combines the specialties of all other noted horsemen and [has been] engaged expressly for wonderful liveliness of fancy, inventive originality and quick concept of difficult and gravity defying acts of equestrianism."

In his "at liberty" ads in 1877 in the New York *Clipper* he described himself as a Brazilian somersault pad rider. In a similar ad in 1885 Abelardo was listed as a somersault rider and Josephine as a bareback equestrienne. Ten years later they were listed as presenting principal acts and a two horse carrying act.

After closing in 1895 with Cortada's Circus, Abelardo purchased a thirty acre farm near Green Broad, New Jersey. On this tract he repaired the dwelling and erected other buildings for "practical purposes."

He died on March 19, 1928 in Bound Brook, New Jersey after a short illness and was survived by Josephine and their eight children. One of these children, Alfonse C. Lowande, was the grandfather of Karen Lowande-Williams.

#### Natalio Lowande

Natalio, a brother of Clarinda and Martinho, Jr., had an active circus performing career from at least 1869 until about 1895. Through 1877 he appeared with his father and other family members on various circuses.

After the dissolution of Alexander Lowande's Great Brazilian Circus in 1877, Natalio in 1879 went to Hamilton & Sargent's Circus and to John H. Murray's Circus in the West Indies. Then followed a number of years on the Barnum & London Shows and eventually on Barnum & Bailey Circus (1882-1887, 1889). Interspersed with these engagements were tours with Orrin Bros. in Mexico (winter of 1884-1885, 1886) and Gran Circo Pubillones (1889, 1893). A final reference for Natalio is for Ringling Bros. Circus in 1895.

Although Natalio began his career as a trick and scenic rider and in 1871 became a somersault rider, he soon after began to specialize in other areas



such as slight of hand, juggling, tumbling, gymnastics and trapeze and high ladders and acrobatics.

After the death of O'Dale Stevens, Natalio became the second husband of Linda Jeal in October of 1885. He was then a featured perch performer and leaper on the Barnum & London Circus. On the same show the Jeal sisters, Linda and Elena, did a juggling act on globes and other equilbristic acts and Linda, in her great principal bareback act, was billed as the "Heroine of the Flaming Zone." By January of 1886 the newly wed couple had separated and they were divorced the following May. Professional rivalry was perhaps the reason for the failure of their marriage.

#### William Lowande

There was another Lowande, William by name, who was reported to have been an apprentice or "adopted" son. He was chiefly a principal bareback somersault and jockey rider, a standing race rider and a hippodrome rider during his professional career which extended from 1877 until 1905. In 1905 on Hargreave's Circus both he and his wife were in riding acts. In addition, she did single trapeze.

Starting as a two horse rider on Lowande's Great Brazilian Circus and on the Great United States Circus (Thayer & Noyes), both in 1877, his talents were afterward displayed on a variety of other shows: Lowande's Brazilian Circus (1879, 1883), O'Brien's, Hardenberger's & Astley's Big Railroad Shows (1884), James Donovan & Co. (1890), Walter L. Main Circus (1891, 1893-1894), Scribner & Smith's Circus (1895) and Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus (1898).

#### Alexander G. Lowande (-1958)

Julia Lowande had two brothers who were famous riders, Alexander G. Lowande and Cecil Lowande. Alexander G. Lowande is not to be confused with his nephew, Alexander A. Lowande. Alexander G. was a champion principal somersault rider and clown hurdle mule rider. Later he became a dog trainer, a knock-about clown, a bounding rope acrobat and gymnast, and an equestrian director. His career in these various capacities extended from 1879 until 1944 (See Table VII).

In 1904 his riding was described as artistic, his somersault riding as good and his antics on a trick mule as wonderful. In 1903 he went to Mexico with his clever wife to

play winter engagements. By 1907 he was dancing and doing head balancing and other feats of equilbrism on the wire. On Sells-Floto Circus in 1913 it was stated that the Stickney sisters, Homer Hobson and wife, and Alexander Lowande were riding in old time form, always the very best. On the same show the next year his specialty was riding in an Indian party headed by Chief High Wing.

On a winter circus program in December of 1913 at the Globe Theater on Wabash Avenue in Chicago he was billed as the world's greatest artist on the rebounding rope who finished his act with the clown mule. Alexander did a principal act as late as 1917 and at the age of 67 in 1928 he was still performing acrobatics and gymnastics on a bounding rope. In 1930 he was equestrian director on Floyd King's Cole Bros. Circus, performed on the bounding rope and presented pony drills. He was a clown on Clyde Beatty & Russell Bros. Circus in 1944.

Alex's wife Carrie was chiefly a rolling globe performer on, among other shows, Gollmar Bros. Circus (1905) and Sells-Floto Circus (1912-1913) and an aerialist, for instance, on Sells-Floto in 1911.

#### Cecil Lowande (1877-1940) & Nellie Ryland (c-1875-1955)

Cecil Lowande was the younger brother of Julia Lowande Shipp. Beginning as a hurdle rider on the hippodrome track and a principal act rider, he eventually rode with several different prominent riding acts made up of three to seven members.

Cecil's wife, Nellie Ryland, had a famous circus background. She was the daughter of Elena Jeal and the niece of the legendary Linda Jeal. She first ap-

Mrs. William Lowande as pictured in the 1905 Hargreave Circus herald. Pfening Archives.



peared as a teenager in 1887 at a private exhibition at the Jeal sisters' training school in Jersey City. In 1889 the Jeal sisters and Nellie, after closing a date in Chile with Frank Gardner, formed their own company and stayed on until April 1890. In November of that year Nellie returned to South America with her mother to perform on Frank Gardner's Circus. After a brief interlude in the States in 1891 they returned to South America and remained there until they closed with Gardner on February 1, 1893.

That season Nellie made her American debut as a rider on Barnum & Bailey and within a month she transferred to Adam Forepaugh where she and Julia Lowande did a double bareback riding act, two horses and two riders in one ring. Scarcely nineteen years of age in 1894, Nellie already enjoyed the reputation of being a most accomplished and finished equestrienne.

At that time Cecil Lowande was beginning his career in a hurdle riding act and a principal act. A Ringling Bros. lithograph for 1895 pictured the trio--Cecil Lowande, Charles Fish and Mike Rooney. In the next five years Cecil spent most of his time on Ringling Bros. Circus, John Robinson Circus and Edward Shipp's Circus (See Table VIII). As a bareback rider on Ringling Bros. Circus in 1899 he received \$35 per week for twenty weeks with 10 weeks of the season lost for a total of \$710. In contrast, that season Albert Crandall got \$60 per week and John Agee received \$10 per week.

In 1901 Nellie and Cecil came together as riders on Walter L. Main Circus where she was the auburn-haired maiden who rode the white rosin back and he was a principal somersault rider. From then on through the 1915 season they had parallel principal riding careers on the same shows (See table VIII). Nellie did a double riding and hurdle act with Julia Lowande in 1903, billed as a hurricane hurdle rider. In 1905 she rode with her aunt, Linda Jeal, and in 1910 in a principal act opposite Sadie Davenport. In 1908 with Cecil she was a bareback, trick and somersault rider and for the rest of the years from 1911 through 1914 she rode a principal bareback act as well as high school and manege.

Meanwhile, Cecil perfected his principal and jockey riding acts, and in 1906 he used a fine horse broken by Stick Davenport. He also rode in the popular and traditional Gar-



land Entry in groups of up to eighteen members (1917, 1922). He continued his principal riding until 1930. During his career he rode opposite such artists as, in addition to his wife Julia Lowande (1898, 1901), Oscar and Martinho Lowande, Jr. (1903), Harry Lamkin, Jr. in the West Indies (1908), Everett Campbell (1913), Nettie Greer (1915), Joe Hodgini (1919), Le Doux (1923), Peare Merodia (1929).

In addition Cecil rode in double bareback or jockey acts with Julia Lowande (1895), Albert Davenport (1910) and James McCammon (1925). Over the years he also rode with a number of large, family style acts:

Riding act including Nettie Dill and Mary Bedini (1919).

Big comedy riding act including Mrs. Dill, Elizabeth Rooney, Grover McCabe, William Ashton and Charles Chaplin (1920).

Indian novelty act including Herman and Bernie Griggs, Blanche Reed, Irene Montgomery (1921).

High class comedy act including Carl Romig, Minnie and Elizabeth Rooney, Irene Montgomery, and Herman and Bernie Griggs (1921).

George Hanneford Family including Albert DeSect, Bessie Castello and George Hanneford (1929).

Although appearing in a number of large, well established riding acts, he was always in a supporting role and never had his name associated with any of them, except as a supporting member.

After a tour to Trinidad as a bareback rider with Edward Shipp's Circus in 1930, he lived in retirement for ten years. On January 29, 1940 his body was discovered in New York City at the bottom of an elevator shaft. He was survived by his widow and three sons, Cecil Lowande, Jr., Jeal and Ryland. Interment was in the family plot at Petersburg, Illinois.

As equestrian performers the members of this great family of artists no longer exist except in the memories of a few. However, their feats are recorded in the literature of the circus, in family records and in other scattered notes from which their wonderful and inspiring story can continue to be compiled.

#### Notes

1. Karen Lowande is a great-granddaughter of Abelardo. She presents a beautiful and most graceful cloud swing act, has appeared on The Royal Hanneford



Cecil Lowande, at left, featured in an 1895 Ringling Bros. Circus litho. Pfening Archives.

Circus, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and at the Circus World Museum circus.

2. This article is being written now because the author has extensively searched the available literature from the 1870's onwards and found material that yielded an interesting story. It is hoped that this presentation will serve as a "seed" for revealing additional information about this family. The help and interest of Karen Lowande, particularly with regard to the genealogy, was invaluable and is greatly appreciated. Thanks are also given to Mrs. Helen Bourque, granddaughter of Alexander G. Lowande, for her help with certain dates and details.

3. Abelardo has been reported to be an adopted son but more probably he was an apprentice of Alexander, Sr. At least one other member of the family, William, was also reported to be "adopted."

4. The Guerin sisters were of French descent and were living in Jamaica when the Lowande Circus visited there. They were the daughters of Emilio Guerin, a circus professional, who died in 1853. Most of the family appeared on John O'Brien's Circus that year, including Alexander, Sr., who was both a rider and a juggler.

5. This fact was related in a taped interview that Gordon Yadon had with Clarinda's son, Harry Lamkin, Jr. in September of 1955.

#### Table I Selected list of shows on which Julia Lowande appeared.

1877-Lowande's Great Brazilian Circus  
1879-New York Circus (Hamilton & Sargeant)  
1882-Ryan & Robinson's Circus  
1883-Martinho Lowande's Brazilian Circus  
1884-Older, Crane & Co's Circus  
1885-Frank A. Robbins Circus; Lamkin & Shipp's Circus; John O'Brien's Circus/Menagerie  
1887-Frank A. Robbins Circus (winter); Adam Forepaugh Circus; Barnum & Forepaugh Circus; Frank Huffman's Greatest Dime Show on Earth (Lynton Bros.)  
1888-1889-Adam Forepaugh

1890, 1895, 1897, 1902-Ringling Bros. Circus

1891-Shipp & Ashton's New York Circus; Great Van Amburgh Shows (Sturdevant & Holland)

1892-Orrin Bros. Circus (Mexico); W. B. Reynolds Consolidated Shows

1893-Shipp's Winter Circus (New Amphitheater, Petersburg, Ill.)

1894-Milwaukee Mid-winter Circus in Exposition Music Hall (L. J. Rodriguez)

1896-Shipp's Circus  
1898-John Robinson's Circus; Shipp's Winter Circus (1898-1899)

1903, 1905, 1907-Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus

1906-Carl Hagenbeck Circus;

Shipp's Circus

1908, 1910-Barnum & Bailey Circus

1908-Shipp's Circus in Panama, Puerto Rico & Jamaica (winter)

#### Table II Shows on which Edward Shipp appeared (in early career).

1884-Older, Crane & Co.  
1885-Lamkin & Gardner's Circus  
1887-Gardner & Donovan (So. America); Great American Mammoth Lyceum, Circus & Congress of Novelties (Col. J. A. Webb); Frank Huffman's Greatest Dime Show on Earth (Lynton Bros.)  
1888, 1890-Ringling Bros. Circus  
1888-1890, 1894-Shipp's Winter Circus  
1888-McGinley & Jukes' International Allied Shows with James Robinson's Circus & Prof. Hayes' Equine Paradox  
1891-Shipp & Ashton's Circus; Great Van Amburgh Shows (Sturdevant & Holland)  
1892-Orrin Bros. Circus; W. B. Reynolds Consolidated Shows  
1893-F. J. Taylor's Circus

#### Table III Selected list of circuses with which Martinho Lowande, Sr. was associated.

1868-Nixon, Howes & Castello  
1869-Dan Castello's Circus & Menagerie  
1870-Van Amburgh, Siegrist & Lowande Circus  
1871-Adam Forepaugh Circus (equestrian director)  
1872-John O'Brien's Circus  
1873-John O'Brien's Circus & Menagerie; Gran Circo Espanol de Castorienas & Co.  
1874-Great New York Circus; Lowande's Brazilian Circus  
1874, 1875-P. T. Barnum's World's Fair on Wheels (Barnum & O'Brien)  
1875-P. T. Barnum's Circus (with Imperial Brazilian Circus)  
1876-P. T. Barnum's Circus; John O'Brien's Circus (West Indies & Brazil) (winter of 1876-1877)  
1877-Great United States Circus (with Lowande's Great Brazilian Circus) (equestrian director); P. T. Barnum's Circus  
1878-Cooper, Bailey & Co. (Australia & New Zealand)  
1881-Martinho Lowande's Great Brazil-



ian Circus (Havana) (proprietor)

1882-Walter L. Main's Circus; Circus of Cantellis & Leon (Havana)

1883-Martinho Lowande's Brazilian Circus (Cuba) (proprietor)

1884-O'Brien's, Hardenberger's, Astley's & Lowande's Circus (equestrian director); Orrin Bros. in Mexico (winter of 1884-1885)

1885-John O'Brien's Circus

1886-Lowande's Mexican Pavilion Show (Lowande & Hoffman's Circus) (manager)

1887-Lowande's Mexican Pavilion Circus Combined with J. S.

Hoffman's Museum of Living Wonders (manager)

1888-Martinho Lowande's Mexican Pavilion One Ring Circus

(proprietor); Barnum & London Shows

1889-Lowande's Brazilian Circus & Royal English Menagerie

(actually J. H. Rice's Circus) (lessee and manager)

1890-James Donovan & Co. (South America)

1895-Bentley's Old Fashioned Circus

1897-Tatall & Cairo Apollo Circus (left 3/25 in Mayaguez);

Frank A. Gardner's American Circus (joined 3/28 in San Domingo)

1916-Shipp & Feltus Circus (Costa Rica)

1920-Martinho Lowande, Jr. Circus (Puerto Rico & Cuba)

#### Table IV Circuses with which Tony Lowande was associated.

1870-Lent's New York Circus in Colt's Meadows, Hartford, Ct.

1873-Don Philip Carforlenas' Spanish Circus

1874-Great New York Circus

1875-1877-P. T. Barnum's Circus

1877-Lowande's Great Brazilian Circus

1878-Cooper, Bailey & Co. (Australia and New Zealand)

1881-Martinho Lowande's Brazilian Circus (Havana)

1883-Martinho Lowande's Brazilian Circus

1884-O'Brien's, Hardenberger's, Astley's & Lowande's Circus

1886, 1897-Orrin Bros. Circus (Mexico)

1887-Frank A. Robbins Circus (winter)

1888-Frank A. Robbins Circus; Gran Circo Pubillones (winter)

1889-Gran Circo Pubillones (Havana); Adam Forepaugh Circus

1890-Gran Circo Pubillones (Cuba)

1891-1892, 1896, 1898-Walter L. Main Circus

1892-National Circus

1893-1895-Tony Lowande's Great American Circus (Cuba)

1894-Scribner & Smith's Circus

1898-Circo Treveno (Mexico)

1899-J. H. La Pearl's Great Railroad Shows (equestrian director)

1900-1901-Tony Lowande's Circus (Cuba)

1902-Tony Lowande's Circus (Cuba, West Indies & South America)

1903-Tony Lowande's Circus (Havana)

1904-Tony Lowande's American Circus (Cuba)

1912-Grand Equestrian Co. (Frank Brown) & Zoological Exposition of Tony Lowande



Cecil Lowande on Gollmar Bros. Circus in 1910. Pfening Archives.

1912-1913-Tony Lowande's Circus (South America)

1915-Tony Lowande's Circus (Buenos Aires)

1918-Tony Lowande's Circus (Uruguay)

1921-Tony Lowande's Circus (South America)

1922-Tony Lowande's Circus (quarters at Buenos Aires)

#### Table V. Alexander A. Lowande's circus connections.

1883, 1889-Lowande's Brazilian Circus

1896-Howe's London Circus

1903-Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus

1904, 1905-Ringling Bros. Circus

1908-Barnum & Bailey Circus

1911-Sig Sautelle's Circus

1920-1923-Lowande Bros. Circus (West Indies) (co-proprietor with Oscar Lowande)

#### Table VI Summary of circuses on which Aberlardo Lowande appeared.

1869-Dan Castello's Great Overland Circus and Menagerie.

1870-Siegrist, Van Amburgh & Lowande Circus

1871, 1873-Adam Forepaugh Circus

1873-Don Philip Carforlenas' Spanish Circus

1874-Rothchild & Co.'s Circus (O'Brien)

1875-Sam Cole's Dominion Circus

1876-Montgomery Queen's Circus

1877-Lowande's Great Brazilian Circus; Great United States Circus (Thayer & Noyes); Cooper, Bailey & Co. (Australia)

1878-Cooper, Bailey & Co. (New Zealand)

1881-Orrin Bros. (Mexico & Cuba)

1882-Batcheller & Doris Great Inter Ocean Circus

1883-1885-Santiago Pubillones Circus (Cuba)

1883-Hobson Show

1886-R. H. Dockrill's Circus (Venezuela and Panama)

1887-R. H. Dockrill's Circus (Panama)

1894-1895-Cortada's Circus (Cuba)

1894-Tony Lowande's Circus (Cuba)

#### Table VII Selected list of circuses on which Alexander G. Lowande appeared.

1879-Hamilton & Sargent Circus

1889-Lowande's Brazilian Circus

1893-F. J. Taylor's Circus

1894-1895-Tony Lowande's Circus (Cuba)

1895-Great Exposition Circus (J. C. O'Brien)

1898-Cooper & Co.'s Circus

1898-Shipp's Circus (winter of 1898-99)

1901-Ringling Bros. Circus; Shipp's Indoor Circus; Campbell Bros. Circus

1902-Great Wallace Shows

1903-1905-Gollmar Bros. Circus

1906-Frank A. Robbins Circus (with wife)

1907-Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus

1908-Barnum & Bailey Circus

1911-1915-Sells-Floto Circus

1913-Globe Theater, Wabash Ave., Chicago (winter circus)

1917-Coop & Lent Circus

1921-Lowande & Gardner

1925-R. M. Chambers Circus (Philadelphia)

1928-Dorsey Bros. Pony & Animal Circus

1929-Campbell Bros. Circus (Adonis of bounding rope)

1929-Camel Bros. Circus (equestrian director)

1930-Cole Bros. Circus (equestrian director)

1944-Clyde Beatty & Russell Bros. Circus (clown)

#### Table VIII Shows with which Cecil and Nellie Lowande were associated beginning in 1901.

1901-Shipp's Indoor Circus (Cedar Rapids, Iowa & Ann Arbor, Michigan); Walter L. Main Circus (with Nellie)

1903-Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus (with Nellie); Shipp's Indoor Circus (Topeka, Kansas)

1904-Lowande Bros. Shows

1905-1906-Campbell Bros. Circus (with Nellie)

1905-Shipp's Indoor Circus

1908-Sells-Floto Circus (with Nellie); Edward Shipp's Circus (Panama, Puerto Rico and Jamaica)

1909-Campbell Bros. Circus

1910-Campbell Bros. Circus (with Nellie); Gollmar Bros. Circus

1911, 1914-Howes Great London Circus (with Nellie)

1915-1916-Howes Great London Circus

1917 to 1921-John Robinson Circus

1922 to 1924-Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus

1925-Legion Circus (Bloomington, Indiana)

1927-1928-Sells Floto Circus

1929-Downie Bros. Circus

1930-Edward Shipp's Circus (Trinidad Island)



1924

The January 19 *Billboard* described the Beaumont winter quarters: "The Christy show is occupying the mammoth steel building of the former Gates Handle Company, situated a few blocks from the center of the city. It is large enough to accommodate all of the outfit under one roof with the exception of the cars, which are stored conveniently on side tracks just a few from the office and main building. The office, in charge of Harry P. Kutz, is first noticed standing just at the entrance of the main building. A few steps from the office is another building used as a kitchen and dining room.

"In the main building first comes the blacksmith shop, woodworking department and pain shop. Dyke 'Hank' Ellis, with four men, is busy here. George Huber and two assistants are doing the blacksmith work. The paint shop has new men at work everyday. As fast as one drops in he is given a paint brush. Manager Christy, Bert Rutherford and Fletcher Smith are busy in this department and there is plenty of gold and silver leaf being laid. Walter Hodgeson, of the band, has been placed in charge of the renovating and repairing of the rail cars, which will be taken to the yards of the Pennsylvania Car Company here. A new private car, to be used by the owners and staff will be added to the train this season.

"Passing from the paint shop across the cement floor one reaches the animal department, where in the arena twice daily the animal acts are rehearsed by Capt. John Hoffman. Madame Devaro is working on a new leopard act. A novelty in the group of trained cats is being broken by Melvin Grimes. Merritt Belew is busy in the ring barn, where in the four rings the horses, dogs, goats, pigs and even geese are being taught new stunts. Belew has already broken a ten-horse act that will be a wonder. He is assisted by Frank Leonard and Harry Newton. Jimmie Snyder is fixing up the props and building new ones. Charles Mosher is at work on the harness.

"Over in the office building the wardrobe is being repaired. Little of last season's will be used, as the rich and gorgeous trappings for the new spec, which were purchased in New York are on the way. Mrs. Christy is looking after this department, with Mrs. Belew and six seamstresses helping out. The cookhouse is in charge of Harry Slade

# CHRISTY and His WONDER SHOW

## Part Two

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

and the meals are even better than on the road.

"Walter McCorkill is busy on his advertising car, which will be completely remodeled and rebuilt, making it one of the finest on the road with any show."

The February 9 *Billboard* told of further Christy winter quarters activities: "In the winter quarters of the Christy Bros. Shows fifty-four men are at work. Great progress has been made in the animal department under the superintendency of Merritt Belew, new acts of every kind having been broken. The horses are coming along fine. Frank Leonard, a good Elk himself, was given charge of the herd of elks just received. He has already broken them to harness and to do an act in the big show program. He has also broken and trained a herd of buffaloes, said to be the only buffaloes with any show. There will be twenty-six menage acts working at one time, all white and spotted horses. The domestic animals have been taught new tricks. Novelties will be trained geese, pigs, cats and rabbits.

"The animal acts will be features and the show will in the main be an animal show, with but few circus acts. John Hoffman has the cat animals well trained and the elephants are being taught new stunts. Ray O'Wesney will arrive shortly and he will be assistant to Merritt Belew.

"The advance car has been given a thorough overhauling and is now ready for the road. It has been painted an attractive color. The scheme being orange

and red. Artist Ed Todd: has done a most artistic job of picture work and the sides and ends bear likenesses of lions, tigers, leopards and elephants. The magnificent wardrobe for the new spec has arrived from New York. It is all of rich heavy plush, velvet and satin, spangled and jeweled and includes

trappings and blankets for the elephants and horses. The new opening will run twenty minutes.

"From special designs a complete line of new lithographs has been ordered. The new paper includes a special 24-sheet, four, six and eight sheets.

"There are ten men at work on the painting and decorating, with Ed Todd embellishing the wagons with his art to good advantage. Four new tableau wagons are being built under the direction of Harry Sells. He has a crew at work on the baggage wagons as well.

"Walter McCorkill will be 24-hour man this year, instead of advance car manager. The big show band will wear uniforms of white and gold in place of the Oriental robes of last season."

The next issue of the *Billboard* contained more information: "With but about six weeks to the opening of the Christy Bros. Wild Animal Shows work is rushing at the quarters. Great progress has been made on the new dens and cages and they are about ready for the painters and decorators. In the animal department Merritt Belew, with his assistants Frank Leonard, Joseph Castell and Ray O'Wesney, have the stock working in fine shape and several new features have been perfected. The train is about ready for the road, with the ad-

This full color letterhead was first used in 1924. Pfening Archives.





vance car finished and ready to move. It stands on a siding that all passengers on the Gulf Coast and Santa Fe roads may gaze on the life-like animal paintings which adorn the sides.

"Claude Orton has been signed as boss hostler. Harry Sells will be in charge of the big top and act as lot superintendent.

"There will be no gambling devices and no cooch dancers with the show this coming season."

On February 25 Christy bought a new stock car and three flats from the Mt. Vernon Car Company. The show moved on fifteen cars. A freight bill from the Missouri Pacific Railroad dated October 6 listed six seventy foot flats, one baggage car used to haul parade wagons, three stocks, four coaches and one advertising car. One observer of the train noted in the *Billboard*, "This is not a 'saggy baggy train,' but good equipment, which will and does attract attention on any siding in any town"

The March 1 *Billboard* reported: "Beaumont, Texas, February 23. With but two more weeks before the Christy Show in winter quarters, work is being rushed to completion. Much progress has been made the past two weeks in the painting and decorating departments and all parade wagons have been finished. Most of them are rich in their trimmings of gold and silver leaf, and men are now busy on the cars. The coaches have been finished and the stocks and flats are well on the way. The advance car, which those who have seen it say a wonderful piece of work, is ready to leave in another week. The cars have been painted a deep orange with maroon trimmings and named and titled in silver leaf, forming a pleasing combination.

"Profiting from last season's experiences manager Christy has seen to it that the show will move fast this year. A carload of draft horses has been received and a mammoth seven-and-a-half-ton Mack Bulldog truck has arrived and been given a tryout. A new and novel canvas loader has been placed on the three canvas wagons that lifts the big rolls and deposits them in the wagons in quick time.

"In the animal department the trainers are about ready for the opening, all new acts having been working in mid-



The Christy Bros. stock and flat cars about to be unloaded. Pfening Archives.

season form for several days past. A new and novel feature will be a lion riding an elephant, somersault riding dogs, a riding puma, a herd of trained elk and buffaloes, a troupe of trained cats, geese, cats and rabbits working together. The zebras have been taught new tricks. The lion, puma and leopard acts, as well as the two bull acts, have been greatly improved. A tiger act is to be added to the program soon after the opening, the animals being on the way to this country.

"The new special paper has arrived and advance car loaded and awaits only the arrival of the car manager, as Walter McCorkill this season will be twenty-four-hour man instead of filling his old position on the advance. Contracting agent Frank O'Donnell is already in harness and is busy ahead.

"Four new baggage wagons, two tableau wagons and a new light wagon have been built in the wood-working department. The show will use new wooden ring curbs and there will be three with a new steel arena. As now planned there will be more than 100 men and women in the new opening spectacle and for this all new and costly wardrobe will be used.

"George W. Christy is well satisfied with the results of his endeavors and firmly believes that he will have one of the best framed fourteen-car shows on the road, both as regards equipment and performance. Additional uniforms have been ordered for the big show band, which will number twenty-two pieces."

Christy noted: "In 1924 we trained five reindeer [actually elk]. This was no easy task, it took much patience. I had to change trainers several times until I finally found an old man with lots of patience. He was a slow going sort of fel-

low, with a kindly manner and a voice to match. That was what we needed to train reindeer. He sat with them day after day, talking baby talk and caressing them. Slowly he mastered the deal and had them following him and doing a few tricks. So they went into the show. That fall I booked them into Gimbal's department store in Philadelphia for five weeks exhibition as a Christmas display. We followed up that same

contract for about five years. I also booked them into the New York Hippodrome for a big pageant about Santa and his workers. The workers were the Singer Midgets. The show was such a success they held over two more weeks. Ray O'Wesney was the man I had in charge of that project.

"At one time we had sixty trained dogs and two groups of Russian and gray hound jumping dogs on the track. We had sixteen different domestic animal acts, such as three pig acts, a goose act, sheep act, a goat act, rabbits, white cats, chickens, white rats and humped cattle. All these acts were worked by men in linen dusters and ladies with sun bonnets. The act was titled 'the barnyard number.' It always went over big and created lots of comment. Bert Dennis was in charge of that number and its development."

The March 22 *Billboard* reported: "The Christy Bros. Shows opened the season in Beaumont on March 15 to two big crowds, with ideal weather conditions prevailing. The street parade went out promptly at noon and was witnessed by thousands. In appreciation of the fact the show will carry special banners and advertise Beaumont through the season.

"The parade created much general comment and was a great surprise, comprising sixteen dens and tableau wagons, forty-six mounted people, four bands and two calliopes.

"Everitt James is bandmaster and Merritt Belew is equestrian director, assisted by Ray O'Wesney. The opening spec proved a gorgeous and colorful pageant, with more than 100 people and animals participating, including Gene Evans and Bessie Bracken, prima donnas.

"Features of the show include Merritt Belew's ten horse act; the Coffey Londrus Grecian troupe; a big menagerie number with sixteen girls and



horses; mixed groups of performing animals; trained elks and buffaloes working together; performing leopards, lions, bears and zebras, trained dogs, geese, rabbits, goats and cats and twelve regulation circus acts."

Merritt Belew, long time Christy equestrian director and horse trainer. This photo was taken in the 1940s. Pfening Archives.



The March 29 *Billboard* published this review of the circus: "As was stated in the *Billboard* two weeks ago the Christy Bros. Shows enjoyed good business in the home town here at both performances March 15. George W. Christy has framed a wonderful performance and a show of fine equipment. Every wagon has been fitted with brakes of the owner's invention that insure against accidents from breaking chains. Instead of chains heavy wire, cable is used. Each wagon also is supplied with a shoe. On the wagons also are new trailer couplers of the owner's invention. The harness is all new, and every parade wagon is rich in carvings and gold and silver leaf. The train was painted a uniform color of orange with maroon trimmings and lettered in silver. The private car has been lettered Beaumont and the performers' sleeper Texas. The canvas wagons have been fitted with a new loader that was built in Beaumont this winter. The show has been fortunate in securing capable heads for every department.

"The opening spectacle, Noah's Ark, was conceived and written by G. W. Christy. Across one side of the tent is a scenic curtain with a cutout door in the center representing the ark. The scenery hides the steel arena. The scene opens with Noah, played by Sig Bonhomme, walking out of the ark onto dry land on Mount Ararat. There is a chorus of rejoicing from the inmates, and then the disembarkation of humans and animals. Through the door come the animals in pairs, together with Noah's family, his slaves and servants, and the long procession slowly encircles the track and enters the rings. The prima donnas, Jean Evans, Bessie Bracken and Mrs. Robinson, ride elephants and camels. They sing a song of rejoicing. A lamb is 'burned' as a sacrificial offering in the center ring.

Then Daniel, played by John Hoffman, is thrown into a den of lions. As he is cast in the arena a curtain is drawn aside and Adeline Bell is discovered clinging to the cross while *Rock of Ages* is sung by the assemblage. Then comes the 'Holy City' and a procession around the track and out to the pad room. During the action of the spec, just previous to the sacrifice of the lamb, there is an Egyptian dance in which twelve girls take part. The costuming is magnificent, both Oriental and Biblical raiment being used.

"The regular program opens with an eighteen pony drill and ran through thirty numbers. The drill was presented in the three rings by Prof. Castle, Merritt Belew and Frank Leonard. The act closes with three ponies walking on

their hind legs around the track. Madam Devere followed with her performing leopards, working in the steel arena. During this act Hazel Logan worked a troop of geese, and Lola O'Wesney the trained cats, which proved a decided novelty. A big trapeze number followed presenting the Great Burson, Leonhardt, Arthur Whitter, Miss Lake, James Lawry and Little Bit Leonhardt. Trained goats in rings one and three, worked by Charles Russell and Frank Leonard, and Miss Castle with the trained sheep in the center ring. John Hoffman next presented in the steel arena a mixed group of lions, dogs and sheep, the sheep finally grouping themselves with the lions. The elephants next worked in the center ring with Sam Logan in charge, and four horse acts in rings one and three presented by Merritt Belew and Frank Leonard. The clowns next put on a King Tut burlesque that went over big.

"Number ten was an ironjaw number, with Miss Lake, Ray Glaum and Little Bit Leonhardt winning applause for their efforts. In rings one and three Leonard and Castle presented trained zebras and in the center ring the camels performed, finally jumping hurdles. They were worked by Lester Brigham. The clowns made every one laugh with their walk-arounds. Next came four troupes of trained dogs, fifty-two in all, worked by Lola O'Wesney, Miss Castile, Miss Robinson and Hazel Logan. The Coffey-Londrus company next appeared alone in the center ring

presenting the sports and pastimes of ancient Greece to good applause. The act concluded with Nick Londrus defending himself against the attack of four armed men.

"Jean Evans next rendered a solo and a large number of pigeons let loose from each end of the tent flew over and lit on the elephant and the singer's shoulders. Following this was the Mobile Wiggle Cart ridden by Agnes Murphy and the elephants carrying ponies and dogs in their trunks around the track. The elephants were worked by Madam Devera and Bessie Bracken. What proved to be the sensational hit of the performance followed when Merritt Belew stepped into the center ring and put twelve beautiful Arabian horses through a liberty act, winding up by the horses, after being mixed up, finding their proper places. They also walked on the ring curb with their front and back feet. Nita Belew followed with her riding leopard.

"Number 18 filled the tent with ladders and swinging perch acts. During the act Jean Evans and Bessie Bracken sang. Those who appeared were the Messrs. Burson, Whitter, Leonhardt and Glaum, and the Misses Atwood, Hazel Logan, Lola O'Wesney, Agnes Murphy, Bobbie Kruger, Miss Lake, Little Bit and Bessie Bracken. Frank Leonard next won applause with his trained elks, buffaloes and sacred oxen, and Adeline Bell worked on the track her trained rabbits. Charles Russell presented a somersault riding dog act. Sam Logan, Madam Devera and Miss Coffey worked three single elephant acts, and then John Hoffman furnished a thrill with his lion act in the steel arena.

"Number 22 offered high-diving dogs and monkeys, aerial monkeys and leaping gray hounds on the track. While Vera Devera wrestled with a lion in the arena, the jumping ponies worked in the rings. The posing horses followed, presented by Miss Castile, Bessie Bracken, Hazel Logan, Vera Devera, Adeline Bell, Miss Robinson and Lola O'Wesney. Sam Logan next offered a big elephant act, and Burson, Whitter and West followed with their wire act. The big menage number went over big and filled all the rings and the track. Merritt Belew and Miss Castile rode the two feature horses, and others were the Misses O'Wesney, Robinson, Devera, Atwood, Logan, Meyers, Lake, Bracken, Coffey, Kruger, Murphy, Bell, Belew, Frank Leonard, James Lawry and Charles Russell. The clown band followed, then came the riding dogs and monkeys, and the show ended with a hunting



scene with sixteen riders.

"The program was under the direction of Merritt Belew, who has been working hard all winter breaking the new acts. He was assisted by Ray O'Wesney, who also made the announcements. Before the performance Ray Glum and Rube Stone kept the crowd in good humor working on the track. The concert offered Nick Londrus, who took on a local wrestler, and there was also a vaudeville program. The Beaumont papers were very complimentary, and every one present was of the one opinion that it was a wonderful performance.

"The side show, under the management of Jake Friedman, presented an interesting program. There were twelve stages and the inside of the top looked most inviting. The show this year was framed for the patronage of ladies and children and there was no dancing for men only and no games of any kind around the show. Side show lineup: Joe Pollinsky, European swallower; the Simpsons, impalement act; Sylvia Andrews, snake act; Eleanor Smuck, sword walking and juggling act; Bert Larow, glass blower and Punch and Judy; Bertina, fire eater and torture board; the Four Larows, Scotch band and musical act; Duke Kukaihoa's Fire Hawaiians; A. B. (Curly) Murray, magician and inside lecturer; Prof. N. W. Dews, colored minstrels of fourteen people; Joe D. McCaullum, second openings, No. 1 box; Guy Smuck, ticket seller, No. 2 box; Joe Pearson, ticket seller No. 3 box; Jack Shaffer, ticket taker; Harry Gorman, boss canvas man.

"Pit show: Baby Rose, fat girl, actual weight 457 pounds; Arabia, six legged horse; Tiny, small horse, height 24 inches; Monkey circus; Charles Zerm, ticket seller. Snake show: Indian Joe Aztec Indian pit worker; Ray Morrison, ticket seller.

"The staff and heads of departments are: George W. Christy, owner and manager; Mrs. G. W. Christy, treasurer; Bert Rutherford, general agent and railroad contractor; Frank O'Donnell, contracting agent; Eugene Statts, manager advance car; Harry Kutz, auditor and in charge of front door; Fletcher Smith, press agent; Merritt Belew, equestrian director; Walter McCorkill, 24 hour man; Harry Sells, superintendent of canvas; Jack Walsh, steward; Jake Friedman, manager of side show; Claude Orton, superintendent stock; Harry Beach, train master; Red Sheldon, superintendent of concessions; Homer Lee, bandmaster; Ray O'Wesney, superintendent of reserved seats; Harry Gorman, superintendent side show canvas.

"The Christy Bros. Wild Animal Shows, after the first week out, is enjoying good weather and consequently big patronage in its home state. The first week was cold and rainy with the exception of one day. Lots were under water and there was a repetition of the trials of last spring. One performance was missed and there were two nights when the show was on the lot nearly until daylight. It was cold in Port Arthur, but business was big at both shows. Corsicana, right in the midst of a big oil boom, was the big day so far."

Christy remembered: "Our second stand of the 1924 season was Port Arthur, Texas. I had taken out my first rain insurance. We paraded up town. We had just finished taking all the wardrobe, plumes and uniforms from the parade as it had returned. Then bam, comes a down pour. The lot was a low one, it got muddy fast. It kept raining hard. I had to cancel the matinee. But I didn't mind, I had rain insurance. That night we had only a fair business. While the circus was in progress I was inside as usual. The lights started dimming. The light plant wagon was always parked near the main entrance to the big top. So I ducked under the canvas to see what was happening. When I raised up from under the tent someone hit me square in the eye with a pick in his hand. The reason the lights were so low was that the electrician had trouble with a bully and had hit him with a wrench and ducked under the tent at the exact spot where I ducked out. So Mr. Bully was waiting for the electrician to come out again. Instead I was the one that got socked. Believe it or not I couldn't see so good for three weeks. To make things worse, no one would believe the story. Some of my workers located that fellow and gave him some very severe treatment."

The July 5 *Billboard* told of an accident in New Jersey: "Many things can happen in a week and certainly the one just ended has been eventful or the Christy Bros. Shows. Tom's River, New Jersey was the eventful stand of the season. The show used the same lot as the Walter L. Main Shows two years ago and it was just as soft. To add to the difficulty it also rained, but this time in the morning, making it afternoon before the wagons could be pulled on the lot. There was a late matinee. The skies cleared at night, when there was good

business Harry Bender, who is in charge of the Bulldog truck, had a narrow escape from fatal injury when a knife fell from the foot board of the car and struck him in the right lung, making a serious wound. The train was loaded and ready to leave when, in making a flying switch, the loading flat was sent over a derail and tipped over turning the truck, pole wagon, one animal wagon and the light plant. Cecil Norton, who was asleep in the light wagon, was buried beneath a lot of iron stakes and mantle boxes, but escaped with only a few bruises. A wrecking train from Perth Amboy had the flat back on the rail about 10 o'clock. The wagons were damaged but were not put out of commission. There was a late arrival, of course, in Rahway and the lot a long way out. It was impossible to give a parade, but the steam calliope was sent down to the city at seven o'clock at night and brought a good crowd out to the night performance.

"Ellis Joseph, the Sydney, Australia, animal man, came on and arranged to



The Beauty tableau on Christy Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.

ship on more animals. The show received two camels from New York, making six in all. A zebra calf was born and is a great addition to the baby family in the menagerie.

"The show had an early arrival at Asbury Park Sunday morning, June 22. The old lot at Bradley Beach had been made into a ball grounds and the show was obliged to use a lot at Neptune City, two miles farther out. The parade went out at ten o'clock Monday morning and made the rounds of Asbury Park, getting back about 12:30.

"There was a long run and annoying delays in getting through the yards from the Pennsy to the D. L. & W. from Asbury Park to Lyndhurst and the train did not arrive until ten o'clock. There was a late parade and only fair matinee. It was a night town with all the seats filled, and the show went over big."



Christy wrote: "On July 14 we were playing Ambridge, Pennsylvania. We were loading the train and had a steep hill to go down. Our Mack truck driver was hauling eight cages of animals down the hill when a car dashed out in front of him and he had to make a sudden stop. This collapsed the bottom of a leopard cage, dumping two big leopards out on the street. Police relayed the news back to the lot and I quickly organized a group of animal men and rushed to the scene to hunt the leopards on a dark night. The cage had jumped the sidewalk and torn down some twenty feet of hedge fence and landed in a yard. After some time John Hoffman, a blacksmith, myself and a dozen others located the leopards crouching on the back porch of a residence. We could see their gleaming eyes in the dark, but nothing else. We brought canvas, nets and flashlights. We quietly approached the porch, slowly surrounding the spot with ten men holding a long length of canvas. At the right moment when we were close enough we rushed the leopards and wrapped that scratching biting mass of life in the canvas. We dragged them back to the broken cage, which the blacksmith had nailed together in the meantime. We dumped canvas and all in and closed the door. The show moved on after paying the man for his ruined fence."

Christy wrote William P. Hall on August 2: "Long run today and my mind at ease so just got to thinking of you. Suppose the farmers are all feeling good in Missouri and Kansas with good crops and high prices."

"We are doing a very good business. Had a couple of poor weeks down east. Say, I will buy those two baby elephants, the small ones I saw at the Kansas City Policeman's show. When

The Golden Bros. Circus wooden coaches and flat cars in 1924. Pfening Archives.

you get the price where we can do business, I would also buy one big elephant that will carry a howdah, must be extra gentle. Would not be interested in any other elephants, only the two babies and one big one. I bought three zebras lately and two of them got killed on me already."

Christy noted: "While playing in Tifton, Georgia on September 20 we had a visit from a group of pickpockets. While the crowd was pushing at the ticket wagon I noticed a commotion and edging in I found a man complaining his purse was gone. About the same time I saw a pickpocket with his hand in a customer's pocket. I quickly grabbed his hand and held it in the pocket, long enough to let the victim see what was happening. Then I started beating the pickpocket. Several of my help joined me. We were running him away from the lot when the law caught up and wanted to arrest us for disturbance and fighting. But the man who was being robbed quickly set them straight. Meanwhile the pickpocket ran out of sight and got away. I know of no circus that ever tolerated pickpockets. We had a reputation of slugging them whenever we found one trying to work our crowd as the circus would certainly get the blame for any pocket picking."

In the fall Christy bought the Golden Bros. Circus which traveled on seven flats, three stocks, three sleepers, one dining car and one advance car.

This circus had grown out of the Backman and Tinsch three car show. In 1921 John T. Backman and Al Tinsch joined with W. F. Palmer to form Palmer Bros. Circus. Michael Golden bought the show in 1923. In July 1924 the show was sold to John Pluto.

The September 20 *Billboard* reported: "Roanoke, Alabama, September 11. Word reached here today from George W. Christy that he had purchased and taken active charge of the Golden Bros. Shows. Christy left here last Sunday and the sale was consummated at

Mooresville, North Carolina. John Pluto was paid cash for the show and Christy at once assumed the management.

"The show for the present will play out the route as billed, but general agent Bert Rutherford of the Christy shows will route the show into winter quarters at Beaumont.

"The show will not be curtailed at present and but few changes are contemplated. Lewis Chase was called by telegraph to look after the show for a time, and Joseph McCullom also has left the Christy show and will act as treasurer and have charge of the wagon. C. C. Gibson, who has had the side show canvas with Christy, goes to Golden as superintendent of canvas. Christy will remain with the show for a time until it has been rerouted.

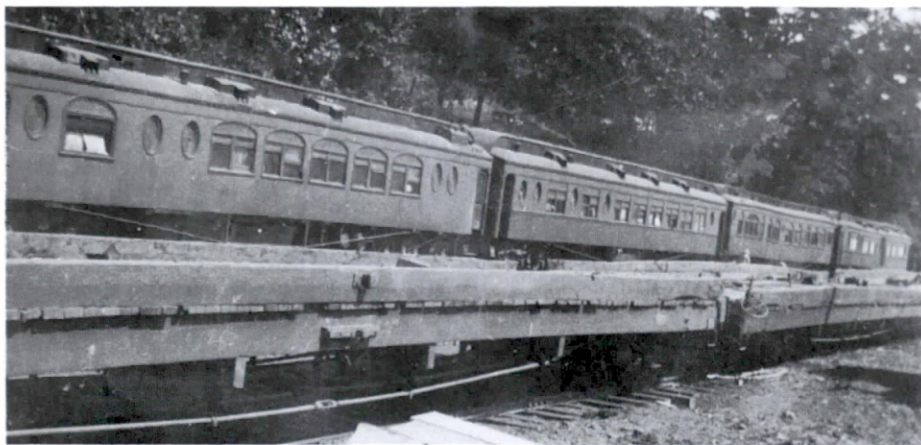
"It is intended at the close of the present season to consolidate the Golden and Christy shows, making the latter a twenty-five car circus. No other changes are contemplated on the Christy show at present, and it will continue at its present size, running until Christmas."

Christy remembered the purchase: "When I made the deal for the Golden show I had Louis Chase with me. While I was at the lawyers office getting the bill of sale made Mr. Chase found that there was two weeks salary owing to the people with the circus. He quickly relayed this to me. So that there would be no trouble with Pluto's debts I withheld a large amount until he had paid everyone on the show that night.

"The next morning we started unloading and I found that one fellow didn't like his deal with the old manager and had hid his team of horses in some bushes. The show moved on minus these horses. I wired back to the railroad agent to look for them. He immediately located them and loaded them in a box car and sent on by the next freight train.

"Now I owned two complete circuses. The Golden band was corrupted and disorganized. I wired Everett James to come over from the Christy show and organize a band. His understudy handled the Christy band in the meantime.

"I had to discharge several other radicals. One was a boss hostler. That night he dragged most of the circus harness from the horse tent and threw it into a dark gully. When the drivers started to harness up there was no harness. So I sent Mr. Chase, my coming manager of that show, out to find this boss hostler, sweeten him up and find out where the harness was and get him back. Chase did that and the





show was loaded once more. That boss hostler was considerably manhandled by Chase. After the last wagon went up the runs I never saw him again.

"The Golden equipment was so bad. The cars were all wooden. That fall when I brought it in I burned most of it and sent it out the next year on Christy Bros. equipment.

"We rebuilt the Golden circus in our Beaumont shops. I called the new show Lee Bros. and sent it out with Louis Chase as manager. We also rigged up a three car outfit called the Texas Ranch Wild West. Jake Friedman managed this show. These other two shows never made any money."

In the fall of 1924 Christy expanded the Beaumont winter quarters to accommodate all of his equipment. He commented: "We arranged with the Beaumont fair board to use the grounds. As rent we agreed to open a big wild animal zoo every Sunday, free to the public. We wintered the Lee show there. My hands were full."

During the winter of 1924-1925 in anticipation of increasing the size of his show in 1925 Christy authorized his master wagon builder Tom Tucker to construct eleven additional cages to help fill a twenty car train. The cages were all the same size, about 13 feet long. Each cage had sliding doors on each end, allowing them to be lined up to form a chute for a wild animal act. The doors were not all placed in the same position, a serious design error. Some were in the middle and some were at the side. Carvings from the Beggs Wagon Company in Kansas City provided a variation in the appearance of the finished units.

The September 20 *Billboard* reported on new Christy train cars: "The time has arrived when it can definitely be announced that the Christy show next season will use an all-steel train of twenty cars. Plans and drawings were received some time ago and have been approved and sent back to the builders. The first new car, an 80 foot stock is about ready for delivery and will be put into immediate use. It was modeled after the new 90-foot freight cars of the Pennsylvania Railroad. One of the cars was inspected by G. W. Christy. The new car is fitted with the latest devices for watering and feeding stock and will accommodate 120 head. A new steel elephant car is next in order and will be delivered, it is expected, before the close of the present season.

"The show had another big week and has been moved by the L. & N. over a section of the road that was closed for five years. General agent Bert Ruth-

erford succeeded in securing the much coveted contract and has opened the section permanently for all shows. As the towns had been circusless for such an extensive period one can easily imagine the business done. At Jackson, Kentucky, only an afternoon show was given. There were 150 special deputy sheriffs sworn in owing to the shooting a week earlier of a mountaineer by the sheriff and trouble was anticipated. The presence of the law in such large numbers had a quieting effect on the crowd and there was no trouble. Irvine was very quiet and two shows were given. The same was true of Fleming and also Lynch. Winchester would have been one of the banner days of the season but there was a long run and a late arrival. Then there was another annoying delay spotting the train, so that it was 3:30 before the parade went up town. There was a big matinee even at the late hour. The night crowd was fair.

"Max Kuraynski, well-known Cincinnati circus harness maker, spent two days with the show at Frankfurt and went back with a contract for all new harness and trappings for next season. Jack Davis has succeeded in breaking the new zebras and they are now used in the street parade and spec. 'Little Bit' Leonhardt closed with the show at Frankfurt. A new feature of the big show is leading Miss Jumbo and her baby around the hippodrome track at each performance after a special announcement.

"Dolling up for the long Southern tour is now in order in every department around the show. The fronts have been fitted with new flags. All of the parade wagons have been revarnished and many re-leafed. The reserve wardrobe for spec and parade has made its appearance and the show looks as spick and span as it did when it left winter quarters.

The November 22 *Billboard* reported: "George W. Christy, owner of the Christy Bros. and Golden Bros. circuses, has decided that next season he will put out three shows. The new show will be a circus and wild west, with Walter McCormick as general agent and Jake Friedman and Ed Heinz at the helm back with the show. It is sure to be a three-car show and may possibly be 10 cars. All three shows will be equipped and



Golden Bros. Circus baggage wagons on flats in 1924. Pfening Archives.

sent out from Beaumont, Texas, opening next spring one week apart. At the present time Mr. Christy has 35 cars and others are being built by the Mt. Vernon Car Company.

"General Agent Bert Rutherford has already arrived in Beaumont with three new Pullmans, two to be used on the advance of the Christy and Golden Bros. shows. The other is a commodious and specially fitted-up private car, Mr. Christy's Christmas gift to his wife. The new car will be named 'Carlisle' after Mrs. Christy's birthplace in Pennsylvania.

"Hank Ellis, who left the show a week ago for Beaumont, reports that he has opened the quarters and that there are now six woodworkers and two blacksmiths at work on the new dens and wagons for the Christy show. He also has the fairground buildings ready to receive the Golden show, but neither of them will be in quarters for several weeks yet. The Golden show, which has been in the Texas Panhandle, has had snow to contend with, but business has been big. Jack Fenton, who had the banners on the Christy show last fall, has joined the Golden show after closing with Walter L. Main. Harry Sells has returned from Beaumont, where he went to purchase lumber and see to it that the work started right in quarters.

"At Schulenburg, Texas, Charles Bowen ran his Alabama minstrel show in for the day to give the company and his officials a chance to exchange vis-



its with friends., Harry Kutz entertained Mrs. Bowen and Mr. and Mrs. Christy were entertained by the minstrel folks. Bowen was accompanied on his visit by James J. Fenelton, his assistant manager and in charge of transportation. Members of the two shows had a chance to see each others' performances. J. George Loos dropped over here and had a visit with Mr. Christy.

"Vernon West has recovered from his recent injury and is working as usual. Harry Delvine had a narrow escape from injuries while extinguishing a gasoline blaze. He was badly burned about the legs and has been under a doctor's care. His assistant, John Johnson, rendered assistance that probably saved his life. Delvine was in the light wagon when the explosion occurred. It has been decided not to publish a route book of the Christy Show.

"If the Golden Show keeps up the pace it has established since it hit the South, Manager Louis Chase's Christmas gift to George W. Christy will be the Golden show all paid for and also with winter quarters money, reports Fletcher Smith."

In November Christy bought two elephants, Babe and Daisy, from James

The final route card of the 1924 Christy season. Pfening Archives.

Patterson and shipped them to Golden Bros.

The December 20 *Billboard* told of the season closing: "San Augustine, Texas, December 15. The Christy Bros. Wild Animal Shows closed a highly successful season here today. The show train left soon after midnight for Beaumont and the show will go into winter quarters at the old location on Crockett Street. The Golden circus is to close in two weeks and will be quartered on the fairgrounds.

"Business the last week was good at all stands and the weather was fine. There were but three rainy days in the past 12 weeks. The season opened at Beaumont, March 15 and continued for 39 weeks. During the past week there was shipped to the quarters from the T. A. Wolfe Shows a carload of wild animals, including lions, tigers, two camels, bears and from the show a carload of spotted horses purchased along the route. The show now has twenty-nine lions, four tigers, eight leopards, six zebras, twelve camels, eight elephants and a big assortment of elk, buffalo and sacred cattle. The collection will be increased during the winter.

"The show has traveled in all 19,468 miles and has been in 19 states. It was around and played in both Chicago and the New York suburbs, and was in Pennsylvania for more than eight weeks. The season has been the most successful one in the history of the show, which next season will go out on 20 cars, improved and enlarged in every department. The season has been devoid of serious accidents. There were three marriages and one death. But three performances were missed and no parades.

"Just what changes and improvement will be made for the coming season cannot be stated at this time. The new advance car is now in the hands of the painters, and the mechanics have six new parade dens on the way to completion. Ike Ellis is in charge and has twelve men under him. The parade will be all new, the equipment of the present Christy circus being used on the number two show, which will be renamed and sent out out a week ahead of the Christy show.

"The next season will open in Beaumont early in March, and it is planned to send out the wild west show in February.

"A pleasing feature of the close



One of the older Christy wooden stock cars. Ed Tracy collection.

was the farewell dinner tendered the employees by Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Christy. After the afternoon performance the showfolk went to the big new dressing room, where steward Jack Walsh prepared an elaborate 'Christmas' dinner. Upon a platform M. W. Dew's orchestra played throughout the repast. The dining room was trimmed with holly and evergreen, and at each plate was a prettily gotten up four-page souvenir menu. As far as possible every dish served was Texas grown from the Rio Grande grape fruit to the baked wild Texas turkey. The menu follows: grape fruit, sweet pickles, queen olives, pickled beets, celery, tomatoes, hearts of lettuce, green sea turtle soup, blue points on half shell, shrimp cocktail, fruit salad, apple turnovers with butter sauce, turkey, oyster dressing, broiled white duck, cranberry sauce, sifted green peas, asparagus tips, cream potatoes, candied yams, plum pudding, fruit cake, assorted nuts, Swiss cheese, saltines, French pastry, peach ice cream, Japan tea, French drip coffee and lemon punch.

"After all had feasted Fletcher Smith (the writer), who officiated as toastmaster, rapped for order and made a few remarks congratulating the Christys on their successful season and on behalf of the bunch extended the season's greetings. Short speeches were made by Mr. and Mrs. Christy, who thanked everyone for their loyalty and the manner in which they had contributed to their success and prosperity, especially equestrian director Merritt Belew, legal adjuster Gordon Calvit and side show manager Jake Friedman."

Fletcher Smith wrote a puff piece for the December 27 *Billboard*: "George W. Christy is now the young Barnum now, but give him time. He is only 35, and when he has arrived at the age of most successful show owners, he will verily be the Barnum in his own right.

OFFICIAL ROUTE CARD

# CHRISTY BROS. 1924

## BIG 4 TRING

### WILD ANIMAL SHOWS

Date	Month	Town	State	R. R.	Miles
<b>38th WEEK</b>					
1	Dec.	Caldwell	Texas	Santa Fe	81
2	Dec.	Cameron	Texas	Santa Fe	80
3	Dec.	Navasota	Texas	Santa Fe	75
4	Dec.	Madisonville	Texas	I. & G. N.	45
5	Dec.	Conroe	Texas	I. & G. N.	110
6	Dec.	Huntsville	Texas	I. & G. N.	35
<b>39th WEEK</b>					
8	Dec.	Crockett	Texas	I. & G. N.	45
9	Dec.	Jacksonville	Texas	I. & G. N.	64
10	Dec.	Henderson	Texas	I. & G. N.	48
11	Dec.	Carthage	Texas	Santa Fe	74
12	Dec.	Center	Texas	Santa Fe	32
13	Dec.	San Augustine	Texas	Santa Fe	20

Season Closes

Total Mileage 19,328

H. P. KUTZ, Mailman.

Permanent Address  
and Winter Quarters, BEAUMONT, TEXAS





Everett James and his Christy band giving a center ring concert in 1924. Circus World Museum collection.

Mr. Christy is not so bad for a young man right now.

"He has in winter quarters thirty-five cars, more than 200 horses and two of about every kind of wild and domestic animal. He owns and will control next spring three shows, the Christy Bros., and Golden show which will be renamed, and the Texas Ranch Wild West. Unlike most of the other showmen, he did not achieve all these from a steady uphill grind and the show accumulation of circus property. He was a good showman and in less than a year has gathered all of this property. It took nerve and money and he had both. Lucky? Yes, luck has had something to do with it, of course, but do not think for a moment that George W. Christy is not a shrewd showman. There is no such word as can't in his vocabulary.

"Last spring there was but a week before the show was to open. Four cages were still to be built. The woodworkers and the blacksmiths said it couldn't be done. Were they right? The answer is that Christy took off his coat, went out in the shop with the men and worked side by side until well into the night and as fast as a side was boarded up and ironed, the painters followed the woodworkers with their brushes. The cages were done, painted and silver-leafed and went in the parade on opening day.

"He was planning his circus for next season the other day and said to his equestrian director, 'Think up some new features for next season quick.' The young man had in his mind just the act and began to explain it to the boss. 'You will have to think quicker than that,' he remarked, 'I am way ahead of you and had that act framed

up weeks ago.' When the other people of his show are asleep, Mr. Christy is busy in his office pouring over maps and thinking up new ideas for his show. How long he can keep this up is problematical, but it won't be long before he will be able to take things easy and let his department heads carry out his orders.

"The fact that he never had a partner was the result of his first venture. Enlisting the cooperation of several small boys of the neighborhood, he framed an amateur circus. One boy provided a length of canvas purloined from his mother's bed, another brought some poles, one boy donated a horse and wagon and the show opened. Financial trouble soon sent it on the rocks. The boys kicked over the division of the front door receipts and one by one bolted with their part of the outfit. The tent was wrecked and the Christy show was no more.

"At this time moving pictures were just coming into vogue and George W. saw a chance to 'clean up.' His idea was to put a picture house on a paying basis and then sell out and move to another town. After finding out that he could successfully handle this kind of show business, he married Laura Highlands of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, who was then attending a business college. She lent valuable assistance and has had much to do with the success of his every venture.

"After making several thousand dollars, he went west to North Dakota, where they had never seen moving pictures, or electric lights for that matter. He opened up picture shows in old halls, vacant stores and even churches. He had his own electric light plant and, to attract business, strung a long line of globes generally from the main street to the front of his picture house. Receipts were big and as soon as he had placed a

house on a paying basis, he peddled it and moved on. Soon he started out with a vaudeville show and pictures, playing through North and South Dakota, under a tent in summer and in halls in the winter.

"Then he started his circus, a one-car show, that proved a winner from the opening day. He had two performers, a few goats and dogs and a grind-organ. His idea was to have only a dog and pony show, as it was cheaper to operate. For years he stayed in that section and Western Canada, finally adding another car and then a third.

"It was with the three-car show that he first ventured into Texas and stayed out all winter. 'Well,' said Mr. Christy. 'I have seventy thousand dollars to chance and, as you say, Texas is so good, we will give it a try.' The show played that state all winter and made Christy more than the amount he had when he entered.

"The circus was enlarged to five cars and then jumped to ten. Money was flowing in on every side and he decided to return to his old stamping ground. Luck favored him and for several years he toured the Dakotas and Canada, as well as Wisconsin and the South. He was not looking for a reputation in those days and kept hidden away from the others. Few in show

A Christy 1924 newspaper ad featuring Noah and the Ark. Ted Bowman collection.

ONLY BIG SHOW COMING  
**DAWSON** ONE DAY **OCT. 8**  
 WEDNESDAY  
 1924

**CHRISTY BROS.**  
 GREATER UNITED  
 4 Ring  
 WILD ANIMAL EXPOSITION  
 The Superb Achievement of Modern Amusement Creation  
 500 ANIMAL ACTORS 500  
 A CITY OF PEOPLE  
 2 PERFORMANCES DAILY  
 2 AND 6 P. M.  
 MILE STREET PARADE AT 2 P. M.

ALL NEW 1000 CHARACTER BIBLICAL PAGEANT  
**'Noah and The Ark'**  
 "Daniel in the Lion's Den," "The Holy City," "Rock of Ages,"  
 Delightful Musical Festival.  
 On Show Day a Special Ticket Wagon Will Be Located Down  
 Town. Secure Your Seats Early.



business knew there was such a show. Christy made a small fortune with the ten-car circus and the next spring it went out on fifteen cars and began to let folks know that he really had a circus.

"His first method was to surround himself with capable executives, although he was ever loyal to those who helped him make his start. In fact, this same bunch is with the show today and will be as long as he has the show.

"What it took years for some shows to acquire in the East, Christy gained in one season. He had his eye on a show that, to his mind, was bound to be on the market before many months. So sure was he that he would secure it, he hired a manager months before and had him with him on the Christy show. The Golden Bros. Circus was his object. With the purchase money in his jeans, he was Johnny on the spot and took possession. The circus was in debt and badly run down, but with Louis Chase to execute his orders, he soon had it on its feet and making money. It takes a shrewd showman to make a show pay for itself in less than three months and bring it into quarters with a big balance on the right side of the ledger.

"Originality is second nature with Christy. His own ideas have been incorporated in both circuses and have always hit the mark. His own coupling devices and canvas loaders can be seen on both shows. He copies from no one, and if an idea goes wrong, it is set aside and never tried again. He has the money, the ambition and the youth to make himself the coming big showman of the country. He has a wonderful helpmate in Mrs. Christy, who pays all bills, keeps the books, sells the big show tickets and handles all the money. They are a great pair. Watch them grow."

#### 1925

Five cars were added to the Christy show for the 1925 tour. The train consisted of one advertising car, five stock



Christy elephants Alice, Babe, Nero and Dixie ready for spec in 1925. Joe Bradbury collection.

cars, nine flats and five sleepers.

Christy ordered a number of special lithographs from the Erie Lithograph Company for the tour. Each had illustrations of the five Christy brothers. Christy later commented that one of the "brothers" was himself, one his brother Harold, one was a Buffalo Bill look alike and the other two were likenesses of the Smith brothers of cough drop fame. This was the first special paper used by the show. Additional attractive special paper was ordered from the Riverside Printing Company of Milwaukee. The title on the new paper was "Christy Bros. Big 5 Ring Wild Animal Circus."

On February 25 Christy bought additional cars from the Mt. Vernon Car Manufacturing Company. Included were three 70 foot steel flats, numbered 58, 59 and 60, for \$2,150 each; and one 70 foot stock car, number 30, for \$3,000. Mt. Vernon was paid in cash on the date of delivery.

The January 24 *Billboard* reported ten new wagons and cages, including a callopie, had been built under the direction of Hank Ellis. A curious crowd of spectators watched the elephant men

Three of the elks tied to Christy's private car in 1925. Circus World Museum collection.

unload a baby elephant, no taller than a lion, that had been shipped from Hamburg, Germany from a stock car. Merritt Belew had broken four twelve horse acts. All of the horses were scrubs, blacks and whites, purchased from time to time on the road in Texas and shipped to quarters. Walt Taylor was breaking in small domestic acts for Lee Bros. at the fairgrounds. A car load of new wardrobe and trappings had arrived from New York and was to be divided between the Christy and Lee shows

For a number of years January reports on Christy in the *Billboard*, many written by Fletcher Smith, referred to addition wagons being built in quarters. If all of these new wagons had been built the Christy show would have had enough wagons to move the Ringling-Barnum circus. Press agents such as Smith traditionally inflated their stories and the constant reference to new wagon construction was the usual sawdust journalism.

The March 28 *Billboard* provided this extensive account of opening day: "Beaumont, Texas. March 21. The Christy Bros. Five-Ring Wild Animal Shows had a most auspicious opening here today, the weather being perfect. Beaumont made it a holiday and the tent was jammed at both performances. At the matinee the Rotarians, the Lions and the Elks took care of all the orphans of the city and the children in all of the city and county institutions and Mr. and Mrs. Christy had as their guests the children of the kindergarten schools.

"The big show performance ran an hour and 45 minutes under the skillful direction of equestrian director Merritt Belew. The big features were the liberty horse act, horses working in three rings; the big opening spectacle of Noah's Ark with a chorus of 100 voices and special scenery and all new wardrobe; the Coffey Londrus Grecian troupe, a menage act of 26 horses, a large barnyard number, sensational slides by Arthur Burson and Kathlyn





LaRose; the football elephants and horses, two lion acts worked by John Hoffman. and John Guilfoyle; five trained elks, racing ostriches and camels, a big wire number and the riding lions.

"The show was packed up and left soon after midnight for Galveston. Houston follows and the show will make Ft. Worth and the big Texas cities before starting North.

"The staff and heads of departments include George W. Christy, sole owner; Mrs. George Christy, treasurer; Bert Rutherford, general agent, Frank O'Donnell, contracting agent and advance press agent; E. H. Statts, advance car manager; Bowman Robinson, assistant manager and legal adjuster; T. W. Johnson, assistant legal adjuster; Fletcher Smith, press agent and announcer; Merritt Belew, equestrian director; Ray O'Wesney, assistant equestrian director; Henry Emgard, manager side show; Norman Daines, steward; Rodney Harris, musical director [replacing Everett James who went to Lee Bros.]; Red Sheldon, superintendent of privileges; Charles Houser, superintendent of canvas; Harry G. Johnson, train master; Claude Orton, boss hostler; Harry Delvine, superintendent of lights; Jack Davis, superintendent of elephants; John Guilfoyle, superintendent of animals; Dike Ellis, blacksmith; Cockie Gibson, superintendent side show canvas; Prof. Deu, side show bandmaster; and William Moore, up-town tickets.

"Christy Bros. presented an entirely new show as regards equipment, train and performance. All canvas from the front door to the stables and cookhouse is new. The show is using a six-pole big top, five-pole menagerie, four pole side show and there are new dressing rooms and pad room. During the winter the show's mechanics have turned out either as new or remodeled 46 wagons and 24 lengths of star-backed reserved seats. All parade wagons are new and they include eight new animal cages, beautifully decorated and rich in embellishments of gold and sil-



One of the new Erie lithos used in 1925. Ken Harck collection.

ver leaf. The decorating was in charge of Charles Thomas. The train is practically new and is made up of 19 cars. With the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Christy's private car and two of the sleepers, the train is of steel construction, the flats and stocks having been built this winter by the Mt. Vernon Car Company.

"The private car is fitted with a large sun parlor, commodious sleeping apartment; roomy office, dining room, kitchen and bath. It is electric lighted and has a large observation end. The show is also using a new 70-foot privilege car. The show has more than 100 head of stock and a large truck to aid in moving on and off the lot. The side show, in charge of Henry Emgard, has been enlarged

The Christy Mack truck pulling a string of cages in 1925. Circus World Museum collection.



and makes an imposing appearance with its 175 feet of banner frontage. Bowman Robinson is back as assistant manager and legal adjuster, Fletcher Smith is again in charge of the front door and handles the press back with the show. Howard Y. Bary has the advertising banners.

"The performance is presented in three rings and two large steel arenas. For the opening spectacle of Noah's Ark a massive scenic set is used, utilizing one entire side of the big top. There is also another handsome setting for the hunting scene which is set up as soon as all the spec scenery is struck. Rodney Harris has a splendid band of 24 men and he renders two enjoyable concerts before the performances of both classical and popular music. The parade has been nearly doubled in length and there are by actual count 32 wagons in the lineup and 40 mounted ladies and gentlemen. Music is furnished by four bands, Lowrie's Scotch bagpipers and two callopes.

"Promptly at two o'clock Merritt Belew sounded his whistle and the first performance of the 1925 season commenced. The opening feature was the Biblical spectacle of Noah and the Ark, but it was hardly recognizable this year, so greatly has it been enlarged and improved. Every bit of the scenery, the rich wardrobe and trapping, are brand new. The velvet and bejeweled blankets worn by the elephants cost well into the thousands. Noah is again played by Sig Bonhomme and John Hoffman is the unbeliever. More than 200 people, horses and animals appeared in the spec.

"The performance: No. 1. Ring 1, performing ponies, introduced Leonard; arena, performing Arabians worked by Gordon Orton; performing ponies, Capt. Bernardi; performing milk-white stallions, worked by Roy Houser; Ring 3, performing ponies, presented by Charles Russell.

"No. 2. Arena No. 1, John Guilfoyle presents his group of male lions; Arena No. 2, John Hoffman and his group of performing female lions.

"No. 3. Evolutions on the single trapeze by Kathlyn LaRose, Arthur Burson and the Misses Deare, Lake, West, Page, Harris and Tinkle. Trapeze monkeys introduced by Tex Chenette and Capt. Bernardi.

"No. 4. A big new novelty conceived by Merritt Belew introduces performing barn-yard animals and fowl, including trained rabbits by Miss Emgard; performing goats and sheep, by Capt. Bernardi; pigs, Capt. Nelson; goats and sheep, Capt. Leonard; pigs, Roy Houser; goats and sheep, Charles





Christy Bros. flat cars on a barge in New York harbor on August 3, 1925. Pfening Archives.

Russell; rabbits, Miss Griffin; performing chickens and roosters, G. Bernardi and Miss Robinson; see-saw geese, Hazel Logan and Nita Belew.

"No. 5. Arena No. 1, performing elks, five in number introduced by Capt. Leonard; Arena. No. 2, performing sacred oxen and buffaloes introduced by Flo Robinson. During this number Miss Del Bonhomme circled the track with the wiggle cart, drawn by the baby elephant.

"No. 6. A clown frolic and the variety presentation of the racing camels, ostriches dogs and monkeys, oxen and buffaloes.

"No. 7. Daring backward slides from the dome of the canvas to the ground by the Great Burson and Kathlyn LaRose. Novelty acrobatic act also by Miss LaRose.

"No. 8. Arena No. 1, performing bears introduced by Lola O'Wesney; Arena No. 2, performing leopards, introduced by Harriet Guilfoyle.

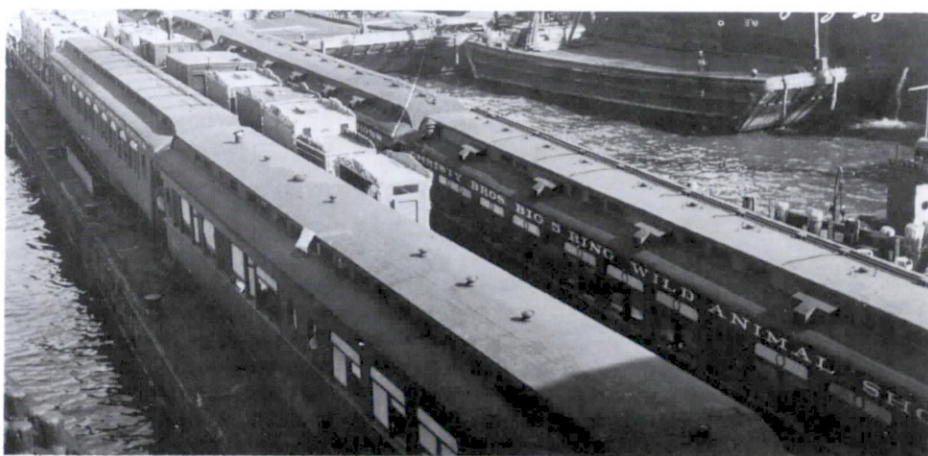
"No. 9. Christy Bros. performing elephants, presented by Myrtle Davis and Nita Belew.

"No. 10. This display proved a riot

Christy flat cars in New York harbor. Pfening Archives.

with four football elephants and the three football horses kicking big rubber balls into the audience.

"No. 11. Song from the back of an elephant by Miss Harris, while more than 100 pigeons are released from all parts of the tent and fly to her shoulders and back of the elephant.



"No. 12. Arena No. 1, a lion and a lamb lie down together, introduced by John Guilfoyle; Arena No. 2, a mixed group of performing wild beasts, presented by John Hoffman.

"No. 13. Five groups of performing dogs, presented by Hazel Logan, Flo Robinson, Lola O'Wesney, Myrtle Davis, and Charles Russell.

"No. 14. Christy Bros. posing horses

presented by Misses O'Wesney, Robinson, Griffin, Gertrude Bernardi, Ella Harris, Nita Belew, Myrtle Davis, and Kathlyn LaRose.

"No. 15. Arenas No. 1 and 2, performing zebras, worked by Frank Leonard and Jack Davis.

"No. 16. Clever ironjaw exponents, Clair Ellington, Ella Harris and Miss Lake.

"No. 17. In Rings No 1 and 3, riding dogs, presented by Charles Russell and Roy Houser; in Ring 2, a group of performing buffaloes, goats, monkeys, dogs and ponies by Frank Leonard.

"No. 18. The big equine feature of the performance, three groups of liberty horses, twelve in each group, broken and trained by Merritt Belew and presented by Gordon Orton, Nita Belew and Merritt Belew.

"No. 19. In arenas 1 and 2, performing wolves, introduced by Capt. Bernardi and Miss O'Wesney.

Christy sleepers and flats on a barge in New York. Pfening Archives.

"No. 20. Three groups of high-jumping ponies worked by Messrs. Bernardi, Leonard and Russell.

"No. 21. A novel aerial number by the LaRoses.

"No. 22. In arenas 1 and 2, riding lions, presented by Messrs. Guilfoyle and Hoffman.

"No. 23. Three groups of performing camels worked in the three rings and presented by Messrs. Hoffman, Davis and Houser.

"No. 24. In arena No. 1, Jack Davis presents a monkey riding an elephant and in arena No. 2 Miss Belew has a leopard ride an elephant.

"No. 25. The shimmy elephant.

"No. 26. Christy Bros. present their big menage act featuring 26 men and women riders.

"No. 27. The funny clown band.

"No. 28. A hunting scene with a special setting representing the lawn of a country club and participated in by all







of the lady and gentlemen riders.

Christy later reminisced about the performance during this period: "About 1924 we trained a novelty act, a snow white horse with a lady vocalist riding. The horse was covered with a beautiful lace cover with gaudy tinsel tassels. She rode into the center ring singing a bird or dove song. While she was singing we released white doves that fly to her and lithe on the net atop the horse until the horse is literally covered with the doves. A beautiful picture. We worked all winter training some 30 or 40 birds for the act. This was done by tying string to their legs and feeding them one by one. The feed was on the net covering the horse, allowing them something to cling to. They got into the habit one at a time to fly to the horse for their food. Then we started eliminating the string from two or three and keep it on the others. Finally we could trust all of them to fly to the horse for dinner, then back to their crate home, where most of their food was placed. We were ready to display the act. Opening day in Beaumont was a very hot day. The big top was packed. We had to lower the side walls all around the tent to give some comfort to the audience. That was fine until the beautiful dove number. We turned them loose one by one and they flew to the horse. The act got a big hand. That was something we

Canvas and pole wagon being unloaded in Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania on June 18, 1925. Pfening Archives.

did not contemplate to have any effect on the birds. But it did. They all panicked and instead of flying back to their home in that cage every single one flew in a group right out through that opening in the canvas. I never saw them again. Another whole winter's training lost. But we did retrain another group the next winter and used them for a number of years. We did it with music from a record player to make sure nothing would distract them. I always used a radio or a record player in the training barns to get all the animals used to music.

"I later got an idea for another first. I personally greeted as many folks in the main entrance as I could. I trained the ticket takers to say thank you to every ticket holder. But now that I was starting to stress animal acts. I bought four or five brilliant red and blue Macaws and set them in iron ring loops on stands. I placed a record player beside them and played it all day long, saying only 'thank you, this way in.' I planned to have the birds take my place in the marquee to greet all the customers. However, I never did quite get that pro-

The Christy lot in Salamanca, New York on June 22, 1925 Pfening Archives.

ject in operation. I did use the birds that season. I built rings along the seat on a two wheeled cart and one over the head of the lady riding on it. The lady drove a pair of llamas hitched to the cart. She carried a baby lion in her lap. She sang an appropriate song as she traversed the hippodrome track. That lady was Mrs. Ella Harris, wife of our band leader. Another distinct novelty, I am sure the first ever seen.

"We trained a huge stork to walk unaided the entire length of the hippodrome track. It carried a celluloid nude baby in its mouth. You know that stork deliberately looked every woman in the seats right square in the eye, as much as to say 'you're next.' It created a sensation with the ladies. I had a clown follow about twenty feet behind with a doctor's small pill satchel, lettered 'Dr. Quack.' The object of the clown was to always be close by in case something went wrong with the stork, but it never did.

"We had an extra big pair of golden baboons trained to hold hands. One was dressed as a girl holding a parasol. The other, dressed as a boy, was holding a balloon. They walked on hind legs around the track. A clown followed holding a tiny, almost invisible, chain leash. But one day something went wrong. One chain broke or got loose and just as they were passing the seats a lady in the front row was nursing a very small baby. Mr. Baboon was loose. He jumped over to that lady with the baby and started chattering to the baby. The lady fainted dead away. We were scared. The trainer walked over the took the baboon and went along with the number as though nothing had happened. That big monkey just liked the baby and was chattering to it as it would its own young. Never did touch or harm it. The lady was revived and broke into a big laugh. It didn't cost us a dime.

"But that same big baboon did cost







The number two side show in Newburg, New York on July 7, 1925. Circus World Museum collection.

me \$50 one day when he was tied to a stake outside with a rope guard around him. To get exercised and sun. It happened to be a rough lot. A crowd was enjoying his antics. A man with glasses was among the. Suddenly old baboon grabbed a stone about as big as an egg and threw it at that very man. It hit his glasses and smashed them. It might have caused an eye injury. We paid him \$50 for a quick release."

No photographs have been located showing the scenery used in the Noah's Ark spec. William Woodcock, Sr., however, left this description: "The scenery pictured the Ark and was on the back side of the big top. The animals stuck their heads through canvas portholes, including a small elephant, a camel, a llama, a pony and even a dummy giraffes head and neck. They had some old lions in one arena. At the rear of this was an elevated pedestal covered with a hood, like a statuary hood. On the pedestal was across, surrounded by some gals with blond wigs. In due time, old Father Noah would announce: 'All they who are unfaithful shall be cast unto the beasts,' and then they would throw an

Christy blowdown in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania on August 21, 1925. Circus World Museum collection.



animal trainer into the den. There, on his knees, amid the savage beats, he appealed to the hooded pedestal. The hood was then raised displaying the cross tableau, while the entire company, including a goodly number of clowns sang *Rock of Ages* and *Cleft for Me*. The faith saved the man in the lion's den. At another point in the program Fletcher Smith announced the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy, 'The Lion and the Lamb Shall Lie Down Together.' Johnny Hoffman then entered the arena where there were some sheep eating grass, and laid down with an old lion."

The circus remained in Texas until April 20, then went through Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana. Christy entered Ohio at Minster on May 24. Moving east fast the circus played Springville, New York on June 20. Traveling by barge the show moved to Hempstead, Long Island for eight stands on the island.

The August 8 issue of *The Showman* told of the Long Island tour: "The Christy Brothers Circus, invaded Long Island, New York, at Hempstead on July 24, for an eight day engagement, coming from South Norwalk, Connecticut, through New York City and all its entangling terminal setbacks. They arrived late, gave a three o'clock parade and started the performance an hour later, to a small house followed by big business at night, to a highly pleased assemblage of some of that communities' wealthy.

"Glen Cove was good in the afternoon and packed at night. Huntington provided fine business at both performances. Riverhead was light at matinee and night show. Southampton proved to be the best stand on the Island, the tent being packed at both shows. Patchogue good in the afternoon, packed at night.

"At Bayshore the afternoon was good with packed house at night and the rain still pouring in torrents. The show left there late and arrived late at Rockville Center, three o'clock parade and four for show. Night show started after eight-thirty to light house due to a local down-town celebration. Had the show arrived in time for early parade and performance, there is no doubt but that the Christy circus would have left the Island with Rockville Center charged up as a stand much to be desired. They went on to routings in New Jersey and opened in Perth Amboy under most favorable circumstances on August 3.

"Christy Brothers Trained Wild Animal Exposition is a most unusual circus and its unique presentation by both human and animal actors, at once compels attention to the above stated fact.

"The opening spectacle is termed 'Noah's Ark' in which every man woman and animal takes part. It is a clever conception in its entirety.

"Taking place in a stage setting back to back with the menagerie top, and spreading out over the hippodrome track into three rings and two stages, all the time singers are chanting, bells are being rung and chimes pounded, coupled with perfect harmony to the music of a most excellent circus band.

"From then on it is a fast and furious competitive tournament of acts in the rings, arenas, on the hippodrome track and high in the air and just off the ground. All the while the clowns make merry in several outstanding mirthful features.

"Among the performing animals there are elephants, lions, leopards, bears, monkeys, reindeer [elk], camels, dogs of ten or more species, pigs, goats, sheep, oxen, horses, ponies, baboons, and in fact about every land animal that can be induced to do his stunts before an audience. Then there are ostrich and other kinds of birds doing their bits. The exceptional animal acts are those of the lions, leopards, horses, elephants and bears.

"The big top has six poles. The menagerie four. A fine portable electric plant illuminates inside and out.

"Rodney Harris has sixteen musicians in the band. Fletcher Smith says



in his announcement that Christy Brothers do not have a circus but a trained wild animal exhibition. The 'Major,' as he is called around the lot, got some fine press notice while on Long Island.

"Jack Croake joined the show at Hempstead and is handling tickets on the number two box of the side show. Jack Fenton fills the banner rope in the big top in every town the show plays. He is a real banner man—not a pretender.

"They have good food in the cook house.

"Six performing elephants are good, handled by lady trainers. Four Grecians do an excellent self defense act in the big show. The football elephants and horses get a lot of laughs. A wild west concert is given along with wrestling and other features.

"George W. Christy reports twenty cars for the Christy circus and fifteen for Lee Brothers, his other show under the management of Louis Chase. One car for each advance.

"Captain William Bernardi is a good lion trainer. The zebras attract attention in the menagerie and arena. Ray O'Wesney does second concert announcements.

"The side show has four poles. There are two horse tents, dressing room and blacksmith shop. A pit show is opposite the side show and there are a few outside stands,

"The parade reveals thirty-two wagons or dens, two calliopes and five bands. About four hundred people are with Christy Brothers Circus. Quite a population.

"Roster includes George W. Christy, owner and general manager; Mrs. George Christy, treasurer; Bert Robinson, assistant manager; Bert Ruth-erford, general agent; Frank O'Donnell, contracting agent; J. H. Fitzpatrick, contracting press agent; Fletcher Smith, press agent back with the show; E. H. Statts, advance car manager; Walter McCorkill, twenty-four man; Merritt Belew, equestrian director; Rodney Harris, band master; Henry Emgard, side show manager; Claude Orton, superintendent of stock; Perly Houser, superintendent of canvas; Robert Howe, manager pit show; Curley Murray, assistant side show manager.

"R. Sheldon, superintendent of privileges; Jack Walsh, steward; Cockie Gibson, superintendent of side show; Jack Davis, superintendent of elephants; Ray O'Wesney, reserved seats and second announcements; Charles Russell, superintendent of ring stock; John Hoffman, superintendent of animals; Harry Delvine, chief electrician;

'Texas' Bill Moore, uptown tickets; Jack Fenton, banner man; and Ella Harris, prima donna."

According to the August 22 *Billboard* the show had a train problem: "West Chester, Pennsylvania, August 15. The sleepers of Christy Bros. Circus came near being destroyed today while being shifted in the local freight yard. In making a coupling the couplers failed to catch and six coaches started down a sharp incline headed for an embankment, a fall of thirty feet. No. 64, the working men's sleeper, the first of the string, crashed into a high-tension pole carrying a voltage of 38,000. The car was reduced to splinters and band-master Dew, of the side show band, who was sleeping in the car, had his foot crushed and narrowly escaped fatal injuries.

"The wires fortunately fell clear of the cars and this alone saved the train from burning. The privilege car was damaged and the caboose also was demolished. The show's electric light plant for the train was also put out of commission. The railroad furnished passenger coaches to accommodate the working men until a new car could be procured."

Christy remembered: "We played Sistersville, West Virginia on September 9. It was a beautiful day, the town was packed with folks waiting for the parade. There were more people in town than the natives could remember. As the parade ambled down Main Street, with 28 cages of wild animals to gaze upon, many camels, elephants and a big group of mounted men and women, five bands and two calliopes the crowd surged from the side walks out into the street. It became entirely unmanageable for the police to handle. The people were eager to get close to the gilded wagons and view the animals at close quarters. I always rode in the number one bandwagon, that way I could whistle signals for the parade marshals in case of low wires, bridges and breaks in the ranks. I was frightened as the wagons rolled along just missing the feet of that tremendous crowd pushing and shoving to get closer. I felt very uneasy, expecting someone to get run over. But they did not. However that afternoon an attorney came over and informed me that his wife was standing in that crowd and a lion had urinated on her brand new dress. He claimed she had \$150 in

damage to her new dress. After arguing every angle, from she should have stayed on the side walk to telling him every cage had a sign saying danger stay away, I finally paid him the 150. It was pure 100% shake down, but cheaper than putting up a bond and going to court. You just can't win every day!"

Bad weather for the Christy operation was reported in the November 14 *Billboard*: "The week ending November 7 was a continuous battle with rain and muddy lots, all night work and missed days. At Wynne, Arkansas, when it looked as if it would be impossible to move on further, late in the afternoon, with wagons still stuck hub deep in the mud and only the side show in the air, the clouds broke away and the sun shone for the first time in two weeks. Early in the day it was decided to give no performances. To make matters worse, the menagerie tent collapsed, burying under it several horses which kicked their way to liberty through the soaked canvas, badly damaging the top. But a few moments previous the elephants had been removed, also the ponies. The top was not erected a second time.

"The lot at Winona was a sea of mud and there was no parade. Attendance was small at the matinee. It was impossible to put up the arenas and performers waded around in rubber boots. The rain fell in torrents all day and night. It was long after daylight when the last wagon was loaded. There was no night show and the train left about ten o'clock the next morning for Sardis. Rain still continued and there was only a small lot available. It was decided to unload only the stables and the cookhouse wagon. Oxford was supposed to be the Wednesday stand, but it was canceled.

The No. 64 the workingmen's sleeper, after the wreck in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Pfening Archives.





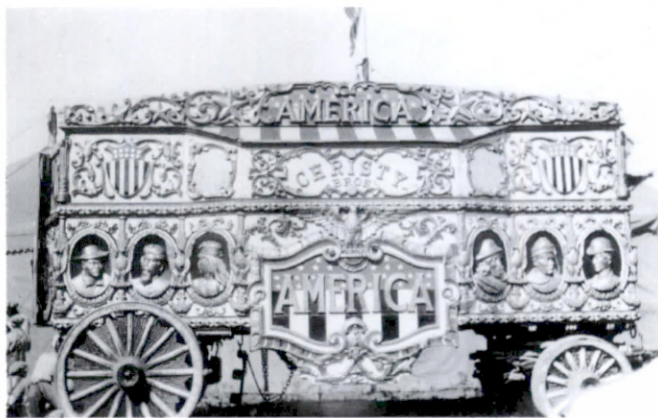


The former Barnum & Bailey Asia tableau was shipped from Bridgeport for the 1926 season. Pfening Archives.

"Leaving Sardis about nine o'clock in the morning, the train pulled into Memphis, where it was transferred to the Missouri Pacific. The train pulled out late in the evening for Marianna, the Friday town. It was still raining in the morning, but the tents were put up and two performances were given to small attendance. The lot was right at the runs, but both the road and the lot were soft and almost impossible to move the heavy wagons. The elephants pushed the bodies fairly off the gears of some of the wagons and the Mack truck was put out of commission. It was late that night before the train was ready to leave. Rain again in Wynne and an all day battle to get the show ready, and finally the decision to tear down and pack up. It was the first time in two years that the circus had lost three days in succession."

The show went on to Oklahoma and back into Texas on November 20 at Bowie. The closing stand of the 1925 tour was Bonham, Texas on November

The former Barnum & Bailey American tableau was shipped from Bridgeport for the 1926 season. Pfening Archives.



26. The total mileage for the season was 21,614 miles.

Anxious to enlarge his 1926 parade, Christy purchased parade equipment from the Ringling-Barnum winter quarters in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and the former Ringling Bros. quarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin late in 1925. Together, these two transactions were one of the biggest transfers of used parade

wagons ever. Remarkably, many of the wagons Christy purchased survive at the Circus World Museum, and had he not acquired them they most likely would have been destroyed as were most of the other wagons in the two winter quarters.

Christy recalled his dealings with Ringling-Barnum: "When I developed our greatest spectacular, Noah and the Ark, I needed lots of wardrobe, biblical time wardrobe. So I got in touch with my friend Carl Hathaway in Bridgeport, Connecticut and asked if I could buy some wardrobe. Well, his first reply was that Ringling Bros. never sell any equipment or property. Hathaway said, 'We do not want to have some other show exhibiting our property, perhaps in opposition.' Anyway the answer was no. But I didn't stop there.

"Our railroad contracting agent Bert Rutherford knew Charles Ringling. I immediately sent him to see Mr. Ringling and tell him we needed some of the materials they were not using that were then stored at the Bridgeport quarters. The final result was Charles Ringling said 'let Christy have enough wardrobe to fix up his show up.' I needed wardrobe and he turned me loose in that department. Again this time all I wanted was mine. So I naturally took plenty. Then we started talking about wagons. Ringling-Barnum had quit parading by then. Most of their surplus parade wagons were in Bridgeport, some were still in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

"The final result was I bought most of their parade wagons except for the big bell wagon, the United States bandwagon, the steam calliope, a big wardrobe wagon and several others. I shipped what I could handle to Houston [actually

Beaumont]. Among them were America, Asia, Columbia tableaus and a number of cages. One cage later was discovered to be a Barnum, Bailey and Hutchinson cage built in the 1880s.

"The other wagons were moved to the Replacement Spring Company at 235 Cannon Street in Bridgeport for storage until we could pick them up. After later taking what we could, we stored the remaining Bridgeport wagons on a lot in Fairfield, Connecticut, the only place available at the time. There they stood, don't remember how long, only that I abandoned them there. I later understood that some of the carvings finally landed atop of a building in Bridgeport. What happened to the rest I never learned. Two years later when the show played Baraboo I picked up what I could use and loaded them on our train. I had to leave several of my older wagons there to make room to load the Forepaugh [actually Ringling] Swan bandwagon."

Circus historians have been perplexed in documenting the transfer of wagons from Ringling-Barnum to Christy. Included were famous wagons that had been built for Adam Forepaugh, Barnum & Bailey, Sells Bros., Forepaugh-Sells and Ringling Bros. Some surplus parade equipment remained in Baraboo following the 1918 season when the Ringling circus abandoned their traditional winter home and went into the Barnum & Bailey quarters in Bridgeport. Using the finest wagons from both Barnum and Ringling the combined circuses paraded in 1919 and 1920. From 1921 on the big show had no need for fancy bandwagons, beautiful tableaus and excess ornate cages.

For historian Richard Conover the Christy-Ringling-Barnum connection became a passion. He, more than any other scholar, analyzed their business dealings. Conover began his correspondence with Christy in 1962 and met with him on October 22, 1965 in Houston. During their discussion Christy shared his records and memories of his dealings with the Greatest Show on Earth.

Christy told Conover he bought the Swan and Lion and Mirror bandwagons; a vintage 1893 Moeller-built tableau-cage, probably numbered 52; another tableau-cage, probably the former Forepaugh Sells Palm Tree; and two pony floats on November 14, paying \$4,000. These wagons were still located at the old Water Street quarters in Baraboo because they were not used on the 1918 Ringling show. They were picked up when the Christy played Baraboo on May 30, 1927. The two pony floats (which were two of the fol-



lowing: Mother Goose, Cinderella, and the Old Woman in the Shoe, all built for Barnum and London in the 1880s) were not added to the show at that time. Christy later commented that someone at the quarters sold them out from under him to Fred Buchanan for his Robbins Bros. Circus before he could pick them up.

Christy's Baraboo acquisition was simply a warm up for the main event on December 31 when he purchased approximately thirty parade wagons from the Bridgeport quarters for \$3,600. Negotiations started when Christy sent his agent Bert Rutherford to Bridgeport to see what was available. From New York on November 13 Rutherford wired Christy in Perry, Oklahoma: "Charles [Ringling] oked today property listed including five cages, ten tableaux, includes tab Europe, China, Great Britain, Spain, China, America, Asia, Egypt. Also floats Egyptian, Japan and clown band also three pony floats, carved groups. From seventy-five dollars up. All set you come and take what you want. Can buy female Bessie elephant, size of Alice, twenty-five hundred. Was on fireworks show this season at fairs with male elephant Coco. Will sell male have others later. Myself returning to Bridgeport regarding wardrobe."

Fred Dahlinger has reviewed the documents relating to the year-end deal and provided this detailed list of the equipment:

Cage No. ? The first unidentified cage was likely a 17 foot former Forepaugh-Sells carved den. It could also have been a Barnum & Bailey cage with six carved figures.

Cage No. ? This is the former Forepaugh-Sells cage No. 61, which had carved bareback horses on the lower side panels.

Cage No. ?, for hay animals. Conover determined this to be Barnum & London tableau cage No. 64. It was made into an air calliope by Christy.

Cage No. 70. An 1883 Barnum & London cage with corner figures of girls, each with an arm raised over her head.

Cage No. 81. An 1883 Barnum & London den with monkey corner figures, in bad shape.

Cage No. 84. The Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson tableau den, now at the Circus World Museum.

Cage No. 89. An 1883 Barnum & London tableau cage, generally known as "Whiskers," restored to original configuration at Circus World Museum in 1996.

Cage No. 93. A tableau den, identification not established.



Cage No. 95. Identified on Christy list as a seal or hippo den. It may have been one of the larger cages Schmidt built for Forepaugh-Sells.

Cage No. 98. A Forepaugh-Sells cage with a flower-like face in the center of the sky board.

Cage No. 99. A Forepaugh-Sells cage. No. 99 was the Barnum & Bailey number. This one never left Bridgeport.

Tableau No. 100. This was the W. C. Coup organ wagon bottom. It was later on Forepaugh and Buffalo Bill, still later on Barnum & Bailey where it was first No. 53 and later No. 100.

Tableau No. 100. This is probably the 1903 Barnum & Bailey Egypt, which was in bad shape and was left abandoned in the Bridgeport quarters.

Tableau No. 102. A former W. C. Coup and Buffalo Bill wagon with large carved side panels and large carved corner posts.

Tableau No. 106. Christy incorrectly identified it as the Great Britain. It had been built by Bode in 1902 for Forepaugh-Sells as the lead bandwagon it was called Columbia on that show.

Tableau No. 109. Christy identified it as Egypt. This has to be the 1903 Ringling Egypt, which was built up into a larger tableau for the 1911 season.

Tableau No. 136. Christy identified this as China. It was actually the Golden Age of Chivalry. Christy never took possession of this wagon.

Tableau America. Built for the 1903 Barnum & Bailey parade.

Tableau Asia. Built for the 1903 Barnum & Bailey parade.

Tableau China. Originally the massive sky board on the W. C. Coup organ wagon, later the clown bandwagon on Ringling. It had a large circular carving in the middle, flanked by a musician on either side.

Tableau Columbia. This was not the 1902 Columbia, not likely the 1903 Ringling Germany, later themed France and lastly America.

Tableau Europe. A built up 1903 Barnum & Bailey tableau.

A Lee Bros. billstand in Stockton, Kansas in 1925. Pfening Archives.

Tableau Japan. Unidentified, possibly of Ringling heritage.

Tableau Siam. This may have been the 1903 Barnum & Bailey Queens float. John Ringling withheld this wagon from the sale.

Tableau Spain. This was logically the 1902 Forepaugh-Sells bandwagon.

Tableau, "used for clown band." Probably the 1903 Barnum and Bailey Funny Folks tableau.

Tableau, "big chair on top." Probably the remodeled 1903 Ringling India tableau, which had carved ball decorations on the four corners.

Three small floats. These were the tops from the 1903 Barnum & Bailey Africa, Asia and America tableaux.

The only wagons that were shipped to the Christy quarters from Bridgeport during the winter of 1925-1926 for which hard evidence exists were the America and Asia tableaux. Christy told Conover that he dismantled a few wagons when he shipped them to Beaumont.

The rest of the Christy-owned wagons remained in the Bridgeport quarters. By 1927 those that were not junk were moved to the Replacement Spring Company in Bridgeport. When the Christy circus played Norwalk, Connecticut on August 10, 1927 the Columbia bandwagon, No. 89 "Whiskers" cage, and No. 84 tableau cage were removed from Replacement Spring and loaded on the train. Two other cages, a Barnum and London tableau den that later became an air calliope on Cole Bros. and an 1893 vintage Ringling cage built by Moeller, joined the Christy show at an unknown time.

About 1929 or 1930, Christy moved his remaining Bridgeport wagons to a lot in nearby Fairfield, Connecticut. Eventually he quit paying rent on them, essentially abandoned the wag-



ons. It appears the Fairfield lot owner sold the Chivalry and Africa wagons and numerous corner statues.

#### Lee Bros. 4 Ring Trained Wild Animal Shows

George Christy selected the Lee Bros. title for his second circus in 1925. It was indeed a second show, and was somewhat second rate. Louis Chase, who managed the Golden circus for Christy in 1924, remained as manager.

Winter quarters for the Christy and Lee circuses was divided in Beaumont between the Crockett Street building and the fairgrounds. Both trains were parked on the sidings at Crockett and were then sent to the Pennsylvania car shops to be gone over completely. The baggage stock was placed on farms nearby.

Everett James was placed on the Lee show. His wife was prima donna and she did her usual acts in the performance. Their son Harry, then about ten, clowned and did a contortion act. Milt Taylor was booked to break small domestic animals for Lee Bros. Bert Rutherford routed both circuses. Allen King was signed to present a large lion act.

There were changes in the Golden equipment. The show moved on one advance car, three stock cars, seven flats and four sleepers. The flat cars were sixty footers. The wooden stock cars were 70 feet long. The train was painted orange. One of the coaches was a pie car, providing the personnel a place for games of chance. The pie car was divided in two sections, one to serve food and drinks, usually from a counter with stools, and the larger half was filled with slot machines and gambling tables. It was always necessary to have identification to enter the car. This kept over-zealous lawmen from gaining access. The show tried to make the pie car as tempting as possible. Often a shill from the hostlers would make a killing on a rigged game. When this man won \$50 on a \$1 bet it egged others on to take their chance, sure that they would also make a big hit. Christy claimed he had never been in the privilege car on either circus.

There were about thirty wagons loaded on the flats. The baggage wagons were painted red. Two elephants, Rubber and Babe, were



Arky Scott with elephants Rubber and Babe on Lee Bros. in 1925. Pfening Archives.

with it. The big top was a 110 foot round with three 40s. It had star back seats in the reserved section.

A street parade was presented each day. The Lee ticket wagon was attractively painted. Christy added the former Barnum & Bailey Orchestral wagon, which had been on Christy since 1922, for the parade. A steam calliope wagon was built in quarters, using the instrument from the Golden show.

The staff included: Louis Chase, manager; Gordon Calvit, fixer; Mack Carter, auditor; Meyer Schlaum, contracting agent; Everett James, musical director; Bert Wallace, equestrian director; Harry Morris, side show manager; Sam Dawson, press agent; Jack Riddle, big show announcer; Allen King, principal wild animal trainer; Slim Walker, elephant boss; L. L. Buckner, big top canvas boss; Joe Fish, train master; and Chauncey Jacobs, boss hostler.

The Lee operation had heavy grift. The lucky boys worked wide open with

Everett James and his Lee Bros. band in 1925. Pfening Archives.



their shell games, spindle wheels, flat joints and three card monte. The grifters erected the side show and big top marquee. The ticket sellers worked for about \$5 to \$7 a week, they made their money short changing. The same was true with the butchers.

By early March the circus was ready for the road. The April 4 *Billboard* reported on the opening: "The Lee Bros. Wild Animal Show, which opened in Port Arthur, Texas March 14, has been enjoyed good weather and

business.

"The program opens with a spectacle, titled Cinderella in Jungland. Master Harry James taking the role of the child. Others in the spec are Rita Bell, Betty Jacobs, Flo Mayberry, Dolly Ford, May Coppinger, Florence Riddle, Ethel Clay and Cleo Wallace, Bonnie Orman, as Cinderella, Charles Robinson, as Prince Charming, Mabel James, prima donna; and Billy Dick, Oriental dancer. The splendid band of 26 pieces; directed by Everett James, is scoring. Special music was arranged by him in conjunction with Mr. Wallace and Milt Taylor. Allen King is principal animal trainer. Milt Taylor is producing clown, and Lee Ford, chief of cowboys.

"The big show program includes ponies, presented by Capt. Terrell Jacobs and Joe Domar; Milt Taylor and his basket horse; hind foot ponies, clown number, Jim DeColb, Bruce LaFarra, Charles Robinson, Joe Walker, Fred Manske, Harry James, Jack Riddle and Taylor; riding dog and monkey, worked by Cleo Wallace; black bears, trainer, June Johnson; riding dog, and monkey, Rita Bell; perch by Misses James and Riddle; swinging ladders, Misses Wallace, Mayberry, Ford, Orman, Jacobs and Myers; bucking mules, worked by the clowns; dancing girl in the lion's den, Alma Taylor; six female lions, worked by Alma Taylor; dancing clowns and their dogs, Charles Robinson and his dancing dummy; cross-over dog, May Coppinger; riding hybrid, Betty Jacobs, trainer; four riding goats, Vonnice Orman; clowns in their cutups; high diving dogs and monkeys, worked by the joeys; iron-jaw numbers, Misses, James and Riddle; Harry James, contortionist; Domar Family of acrobats; dog act,



Miss Wallace; Milt Taylor and his goats; dogs, Miss Mayberry; clown walk-around; camels, Joe Domar; elephants, Miss Johnson; bird song, *Blue Bird Land*, Madam James and 30 pigeons; posing horses, Misses Wallace, Bell, Ford, Kohn, Coppinger, Mayberry, Johnson, Orman and Jacobs; Milt Taylor and Bruce LaFarra and their fire-wagon gag; elephant and pony, Miss Bell; elephant and dog, Miss Myers; dancing elephant, Sadie Kohn; clowns; a pigeon act, Miss Mayberry; leopards and pumas, by Alma Taylor; Milt Taylor and his six performing pigs; clown number; a 14 full-grown African male and female lions, Allen King; 16 high-school and menage horses, worked by Misses Wallace, Bell, Riddle, Taylor, Orman, James, Myers, Coppinger, Betty Jacobs, Johnson, Mayberry, Ford, Kohn and Dewey Coppinger, Joe Domar, Capt. Jacobs and Lee Ford. Rabbit, in an old-fashioned one step, is featured and the animal's mount is Miss Taylor; King Billy, ridden by Cleo Wallace, in an old fashioned chicken reel; Button Boy, ridden by Betty Jacobs in a hesitation waltz; clowns in crazy walk-around; English fox hunt, the high jumps done by Dan Lad, ridden by Miss Wallace; Sultan Boy, ridden by Miss Jacobs; Mighty Girl, by Miss Riddle; Button Boy, by Jess Coppinger; broad jumping horses-Star Boy, ridden by Alma Taylor; Squirrel, by Miss Myers; Rabbit, by Rita Bell. The per-

# Superior Mon. 1 JUNE

Afternoon and Night  
LEE BROS. 4-RING WILD ANIMAL SHOWS



Newly Added Fairyland Spectacle  
**Cinderella in Jungleland**  
Mile Long Gorgeous, Free Street Parade at 11 A. M.  
1925

Lee Bros. newspaper ad used in Superior, Wisconsin in 1925. Pfening Archives.

formance is concluded by Bruce LaFerra, Charles Robinson and Milt Taylor with their burro race over the hurdles."

It is interesting to note that Terrell Jacobs worked only domestic animals acts.

After the opening Lee Bros. went east across Texas to Oklahoma, Nebraska, Wyoming, North Dakota and Minnesota. Moving south back through Nebraska and into Iowa, it then cut through Kansas to Missouri. A red one for the show was in Richmond, Missouri on August 4.

Lee Bros. appeared in Illinois and Indiana, then went south through Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama. It entered Georgia on September 15 at Dalton. Christy Bros. was also in Georgia at the time. On a run from Vidalia, Georgia one of the Lee cars broke down and the train was stopped in Macon for repairs.

Theo Forstall joined the show to finish the season in the ticket wagon, coming from the Gentry-Patterson Circus which had closed early. Forstall found the Lee office records in total disarray and set to work at once to begin making up proper ledgers like those he had used on American Circus Corporation shows. He remembered the Lee outfit as a real pile of junk.

In the October 25 *Billboard* press agent Sam Dawson related problems during the season: "It is doubtful any other tented organization has had a more harassing season. Leaving Beaumont, Texas on March 15 it showed a part of Texas that had not seen rain for eight months and encountered plenty of

wind and sand. Turning north through Colorado the show went into the Dakotas to catch the early rain storms of spring, then up to the Canadian border, and to the western part of Kansas where it encountered a drought which necessitated jumping from Abilene, Kansas to Richmond, Missouri. The show hurried south to Georgia where the territory was having fine crops. Rainfall in that section was abundant."

A *Billboard* report in mid-October stated that that the Lee circus would be sold at the end of the season and replaced in the spring with a wild west show. Christy had received several offers during the season. The wild west show was to be was to be framed immediately after the close of the Christy outfit, and open in the south. All of the Lee elephants and other animals were to be added to the Christy show next season.

The Lee circus returned to Texas on November 16 at Jasper. Thanksgiving dinner was served in the cookhouse on November 26 in Marlin, Texas. The long season closed on December 14 in Orange, Texas and the show returned to quarters in Beaumont.

For a few weeks in the spring of 1925 Christy also operated the Texas Ranch Wild West, a three car show managed by Jake Friedman. It garnered virtually no *Billboard* coverage and little is known about it.

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Photos or slides of flat cars made from cut down stock or whale show cars on any circus or carnival.

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The band music shifts as spotlights pick up a cocoon suspended high above the rings of the 1996 edition of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The cocoon spins, a hand reaches out, then another before an acrobat, costumed as a butterfly, emerges and stretches into life. The music changes and lights pick up a thirty foot vertical web and five spider acrobats.

The butterfly works her way from the cocoon to a horizontal rope where she begins her life in a cloud swing. On the floor a spider acrobat, arched backward on all fours, makes her way to a rope and spins on it as she is lifted to the arms of a spider catcher far above.

This is the beginning of The Spider Web, a startling new aerial act, developed last fall at the Bolton Valley resort in Vermont, that is touring with the Blue Unit of the Greatest Show on Earth for two years. The idea for the act was presented to the annual circus production meeting one year before the act faced its first audience.

The act was proposed by Alla Youdina, a performing star and administrator in the Russian circus system before joining the Ringling or-

The whole troupe posed on the web in Bolton Valley along with a clown and a keyboardist. All photos by the author.

# ACROBATS ON A SPIDER WEB

By Robert Sugarman

ganization six years ago to assist Tim Holst, the circus' talent coordinator. Youdina, vivacious, bookish, mystic--she can read palms--and a passionate advocate of "circus art," created the bungee act on the previous edition of the Big Show and the act of the Chicago Kidz, street performers she transformed into circus professionals. This time she imagined a butterfly interacting with spiders on a giant web. She transferred her vision to drawings and convinced Holst and the others at the December 1994 meeting that the Spider Web would be exciting, entertaining and viable.

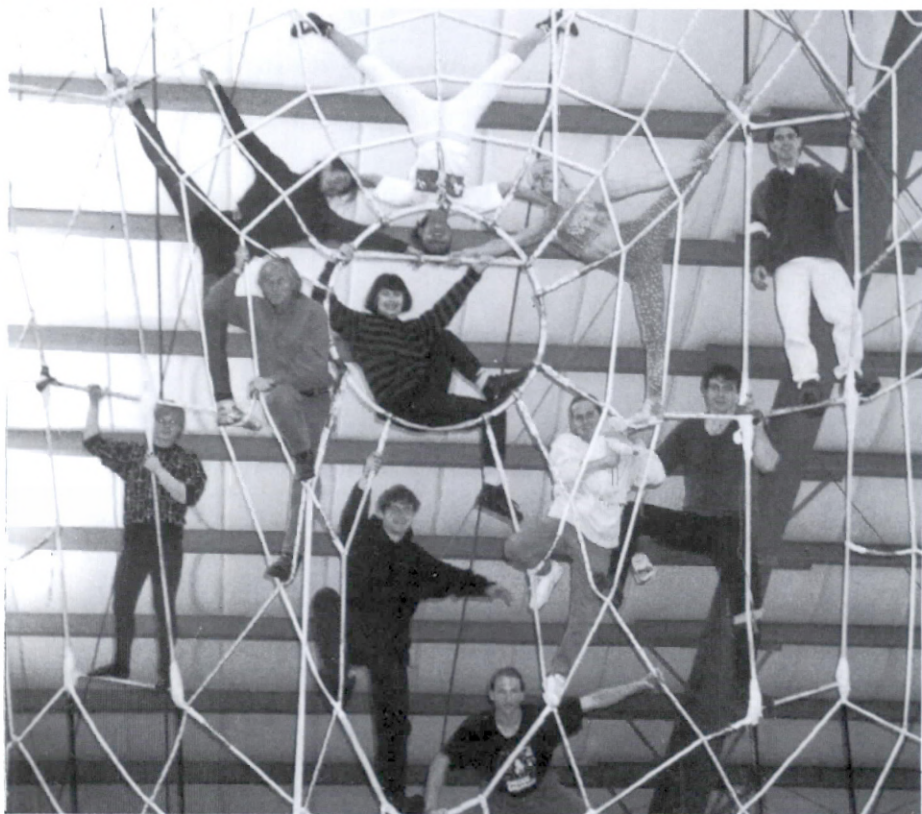
A hurdle to the creation of the act was the web itself, rope-wrapped cables strong enough to support five performers, flexible enough to be quickly erected. After Youdina designed it, she found no one who could fabricate it from her designs and models. Her performers

could not be signed to a contract until there was a web. In May, Holst told Youdina to go ahead if she could. So last summer, at the Greensboro, Vermont home of Rob Merman, director of Circus Smirkus, a Vermont Youth Circus, Ivan Youdin and Gregoriy Youdin, Youdina's sons--one a computer maven, the other a student in a select graduate program in robotics in Moscow--created the web in two weeks working day and night under their mother's supervision.

The six performers she recruited for the act, three Russians, a Mongolian and two Americans, met at the Sports Center of the Bolton Valley Ski Resort in Northern Vermont last September. Three months later they presented a finished act at the rehearsals of the 126th edition of the Greatest Show on Earth in Tampa, Florida.

Youdina found her butterfly, Katia Odintsova, performing in a trapeze act in Paris. Victoria Voltchok (Vika), another Russian; Gigi (with a hard "G") Batmunh, a Mongolian; and Joni Lasikov, an American married to a Hungarian acrobat who is now performance director of the Ringling Red Unit were dancers with the previous edition of the Blue show. Oleg Sergachov, the catcher, another Russian, was working in a Moscow circus studio. Chris Clark, the other American, was performing with Circus Smirkus

Alla Youdina coaching the act in two languages during a run through in Tampa.





for which Youdina has been a coach as long as she has been with Ringling Bros. She happily works with America's largest and one of the smallest circuses, developing talent and instilling the sense of circus excellence she developed in the Russian circus system which is now radically changed.

For seventy yeras the Soviet Union honored circuses and it was under this system Youdina acquired her expertise. The system provided excellent training for performers who worked in 72 full-time circus buildings across the Soviet Union. Each building provided health and other services and ten support personnel stood behind each performer. Today the Russian circus organization, *SoyuzGostsirk*, no longer controls the buildings and 12,000 skilled performers are hard pressed to find places to perform. Some no longer do. "Now they sell carrots in markets," Youdina observes. *SoyuzGostsirk* no longer provides free rehearsal space or food for the animal acts. Ms. Youdina's sister presented a mixed animal act for twenty years in Russian circuses, now she boards thirty-five animals, including a bear, at her own expense.

She finds occasional bookings, but no longer has five grooms to assist her. Ringling, not the Russian system, now provides the opportunity for Alla Youdina to fulfill her visions.

She began to work in this country as the East European sources of acts for American circuses were drying up. In addition, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey found that American impresario Steve Leber had an exclusive fifty year contract with *SoyuzGostsirk* for the appearance of Russian performers in America. While Perestroika impacted negatively on the Russian circus system, it made it possible for Youdina to help Holst seek out and engage Russian performers for Ringling. At the same time, Youdina finds Russian youth performers for Circus Smirkus. By creating new acts, she not only fulfills her dreams, she helps fill the gap left by the erosion of the East European circus systems.

Youdina found circuses in North America changing, too. The Big Apple, Circus Flora, Cirque du Soleil and others present well rehearsed, thematically integrated performances in which acts perform to specially composed music. Traditional American circuses were more like vaudeville shows in which unrelated acts performed the



Vika Voltchok (left) and Joni Laskov.

same way and to the same music no-matter where they were booked. Little rehearsal beyond what went into maintaining and developing each act was required. While the New American Circuses reflect the influence of European circus performance, they perform in a single ring, they also incorporate technologies pioneered in electronic music and rock concerts.

The same changes are found in the Ringling shows although on a larger scale. The Spider Web is not an isolated act; it introduces an environmental theme that is developed with specially composed music and high tech design

Katia Odintsova on the cloud swing.



which culminates in an elaborately choreographed production number utilizing all the circus performers, cosack horses, and elephants. Unlike the shows that have one theme, the 126th edition of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey has three in a fashion appropriate to the Greatest Show on Earth. One theme is technological. Interactive television begins the show and moves the audience from its usual way of viewing entertainment to the excitement of live performance. A medieval theme with warriors and mythical and real beasts introduces the featured act, Ariana, the Human Arrow, a young woman shot from a giant crossbow. As the New American Circuses, what Ringling producer Kenneth Feld refers to as "boutique" circuses, play to small, upscale audiences, the Big Show integrates the new (and old) ideas into its traditional three ring format that continues to accommodate a broader audience.

Working individual performers and acts into the themes required a month of long, six day a week rehearsals at the winter quarters in Tampa, but the work began much earlier. While the Spider Web rehearsed in Vermont, Youdina was in phone and FAX contact with related acts that were being shaped in China and elsewhere. Just before leaving for winter quarters, Youdina and the circus management faced a problem. The United States government had closed down and it looked as if the distant performers with whom the circus was already working would be unable to obtain visas that would enable them to reach Florida for rehearsals before the Circus started its tour. In the period between the two government closings, visas were granted and the performers arrived, although some were delayed.

It is not surprising Youdina enhances traditional circus art with poetic imagery. Her inclination to think that way was enriched by her academic education in theatre criticism. While her sons grew up, she worked as a dramaturg in Russian theatres choosing plays and helping playwrights develop their scripts. Her academic thesis dealt with performance imagery. When Danny Herman, director of the new Ringling production, visited the work at Bolton Valley, he said, "I love to hear Alla talk about circus art."

To the six young people gathered in Bolton Valley, she brought a vision of a particular





Katia, Alla, Rob Mermin, director of Vermont's Circus Smirkus and Vika.

circus act and a concept of circus performance that helped them created the act in three months. The world is not the same as that in which the Cranes, one of the final flowers to bloom under the old Russian system, was allowed four years to rehearse. In three months of intense work, Youdina and her performers created a stunning act.

"Before I make an act, I must make a team," Youdina says and, like a good theatre director, she responds to the uniqueness of her performers. In Vermont, watching the four women in the act do a ballet *barre*, she observed, "Character is important in circus. You see it's four girls and they do *foutees* now and each *foutee* is different. Why? Not because of their bodies, because their brains are different and I see this character immediately. You can write whole story-biography based on just one *foutee*." Each performer's uniqueness helped shape the act Youdina imagined.

At the same time she responded to their individuality, Youdina led the performers to know and trust each other. In theatre it helps to have a team; in circus where people's physical safety is at stake, it is essential.

The six member troupe--no understudies, the squad is the team--must survive the rigors of a two year tour and rehearsals prepared for that. Warm ups employed meditation and Youdina taught massage and other techniques to enable her young artists to maintain their individual selves and the quality of their act. Youdina will not travel with the Spider Web, she is already at work on an act for next year, but will visit regularly and, as with last year's bungee act now in its

second year, she will be in constant phone contact.

When Youdina reached Florida, in addition to her continuing work with the Spider Web, she assumed other roles. The circus lost its Russian translator so as the director led rehearsals for production numbers, Youdina stood beside him translating to the Russian speaking performers.

When one of the horses of the Cossack troupe newly arrived from Kazikstan was ill, she translated for the Cossacks and the Ringling veterinarian who helped the animal back to health.

In their Tampa rehearsals, the Spider Web troupe found things changed from Bolton Valley. The rigging, now supported from more places on the floor, was firmer. Tricks that had been pos-

The thirty foot Spider Web in position in Tampa.



sible before, had to be adjusted as it was now harder to wrap one's feet around the web. The distance between the catcher and the web was now greater. Youdina agreed the changes were substantial, but reminded her troupe, "Circus is hard." A comment she often accompanied with, "Circus needs exceptional people," as she helped her troupe negotiate the transition to a changed world. No longer resident in an off season ski resort, the performers moved into the circus train that would be their home for two years. Instead of being alone, they were now part of a company of 148 performers, with almost 300 support personnel. In addition to the work on their act, they had to perfect their juggling for the opening number and practice their roles in Herman's meticulously wrought production numbers. The cassette to which they had rehearsed in Vermont was replaced with live musicians. The Spider Web performers became acquainted with the members of the crew of ring one, each ring has its own crew, as the crew members learned their roles in supporting the performers during the act. In Vermont, Gennadiy Totukhov, Youdina's associate trainer, and her son Vanya ran from one supporting rope to another. Here, a staff of strangers learned the moves that would ensure the performers' safety.

The performers didn't just replicate what they had done in Vermont. Youdina pushed them further toward her vision of the act. Tricks Katia, the butterfly, did in Vermont with two hands, she now did with one. Youdina was demanding. "You must be aggressive, like tigers in cage," she explained to her butterflies so that their performances would read in the arenas where the circus would perform. While honing the act and translating for the Russian speaking performers, Ms. Youdina developed material for the production numbers. Would it all get done? "It would, it must," she said.

Behind the bleachers in the rehearsal arena, the Human Arrow perfected her form in practice shots coached by former Ringling star Elvin Bale. "If you can see it in your mind," he told her, "you can do it." Alla Youdina had seen the Spider Web in her mind for a year and her troupe was coming closer to fulfilling what she had seen. Audiences across the country will see technology, themes, new music and elaborate production numbers wedded to the human ability to achieve wonder that has always been the great theme of circus and the inspiration for artists like Alla Youdina.



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# CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S 1996 NATIONAL CONVENTION

Participation was the key feature of the 1996 CHS convention. The 107 registrants from across the United States and two foreign countries who came to Baraboo, Wisconsin were treated to a three day program presented by no less than 24 people. They read 13 papers, participated in a panel discussion and an oral interview, held poster exhibitions and projected several slide presentations. The convention attendees also viewed Circus World Museum's circus and new circus music exhibit and toured the homes of two of the Ringling brothers, in addition to receiving a maximum dosage of fellowship and conversation. It was a satisfying affair which celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first Circus Historical Society convention in 1946.

The event on started on Monday, July 15, with registration and a luncheon buffet at the Henry Ringling residence, courtesy of his grand-daughter, Sally Clayton-Jones, who demonstrated her considerable culinary skills. The afternoon session of papers started with animal authority Richard J. Reynolds III speaking about Bucheet, the first hippo in America. The 1906 origin and subsequent development of the Shrine circus was the focus of John H. McConnell's pioneering paper and slide presentation. Circus great George Hanneford, Jr., then regaled the audience with some of his memories of shows and showmen of the past, provoking both wonder and laughter. A continuing and entertaining look at the circus heritage of Bloomington, Illinois was provided by Steve Gossard's slide presentation. The evening was filled with a visit to the Al Ringling home, now the Elk's lodge, the attached banquet hall being the site of the evening's catered meal and CHS benefit auction. Quite a few members took home bargains which raised \$2,367 for the CHS treasury.

Buffalo Bill scholar Sarah Blackstone commenced the Tuesday session with her paper on Col. Cody and his wild west outside the gates of the 1893 Chicago

fair. William L. Slout's engaging paper on James M. Nixon at Niblo's Garden was read in Bill's stead by Dave Price. A five member panel, comprised of Ernest Albrecht, Hovey Burgess, Tim Holst, Dominique Jando and Greg Parkinson tackled the theme of "The Circus In Contemporary America." The commentary ranged from personal career experience to observations on what the circus of the near term future will embody. It provoked considerable audience involvement and effectively displayed the profound knowledge and expertise of panel members.

The afternoon was devoted to learning about Circus World Museum collections and programming. It started with a visit to the Circus Music exhibit, where members were treated to the standard program and the world premiere of an arrangement of tunes from the film "The Greatest Show On Earth" on the Gavioli band organ. CWM Curator Sherry Huhn revealed the history of the various winter quarters structures in Ringlingville and later provided viewers with a common sense introduction to the care and management of artifacts. A display of forty-one posters from the CWM archives spanning the period from 1832 to 1938 was co-ordinated by CWM Archivist Bill Jackson.

Following the recognition of long term members by Secretary-Treasurer Dave Price and President Fred Dahlinger's remarks on the state of the CHS, Arthur Saxon enlightened listeners with his

The Henry Ringling residence, where CHS members registered. Fred Pfening, Jr. photo.



featured presentation "New Light on the Life of James A. Bailey." The speech contained entirely new information on the personal life of Bailey, which in turn provided a wholly new perspective on understanding his involvement in the circus business.

The final day of the assembly was led by Janet Davis' paper on women, race and respectability at the American circus. It provoked considerable interest from the audience. Dan Draper continued his documentation of equestrians by unraveling the complex history of the Lowande family with his paper. The origins of the risley act were revealed by Stuart Thayer in another of his erudite presentations. Steve Gossard mounted the podium for the second time with an illuminating slide presentation depicting some of the posters in the Illinois State University collections.

Despite a light rain, members shared lunch with CWM performers at the Bengal Barbecue courtesy of CWM's Eric McConnell. A return to the auditorium gave members two entirely different perspectives on the circus. Margie Shannon's scholarly paper zeroed in on the circus' efforts to manipulate the audience was very thought provoking. Canadian circus owner and historian Al Stencell had the group laughing till it cried, listening to how he framed his circus from scratch with no scratch. The funniest CHS presentation since Bobby Gibbs addressed the group a decade ago, it was also notable for its considerable appreciation and high regard for show people.

The program concluded with a group visit to the CWM Popcorn and Lemonade Circus. Numerous members witnessed the return of the Great Circus Train Wednesday evening, enjoyed a special Baraboo band concert of circus music on Thursday night, and continued their visitations and research at the CWM and its noted library and research center until well into the next week.

## Remarks by President Fred Dahlinger, Jr. at the 1996 CHS Convention Banquet

This is the 50th Anniversary of the first Circus Historical Society national convention in Peru, Indiana on April 11 to 14, 1946. The society was founded in 1939, but because of the war it was seven years before a gathering could be arranged. Only one of the member registrants, George Hubler, and



one young guest, Albert Conover, remain CHS members. The 1946 program schedule included one entire day of jackpotting, three business sessions, visits to the American Circus Corporation and Terrell Jacobs quarters, a memorial service at the local cemetery, a museum visit and a grand banquet. Though there were 28 registrants from ten states at the event, local circus personnel and members of other circus organizations raised the banquet attendance to 85. The June 1946 *Bandwagon*, which carried the convention news, was eight single sided mimeographed pages, a monthly publication with a single cover illustration. The roster printed in March 1946 listed a total of 246 members. A 1946 financial statement could not be located, but with a \$1.00 dues fee and a \$2.00 *Bandwagon* subscription, it suggests an annual cash flow of about \$750.

Today the CHS membership stands at about 1,200, a 500% increase. *Bandwagon*, now a bimonthly journal, is recognized around the world as the finest publication of its type. Last year it filled 300 pages with significant narratives about the circus, a more than three fold increase in size, not to mention the tremendous informational and printing quality advances. Our journal includes hundreds of illustrations, employs colorizing, uses full color covers and is published using state of the art software and graphics. Our conventions draw as many as 150 people but usually host 50 to 75 member registrants, a four fold increase. In lieu of business meetings and at will visitations, our programs now feature a dozen or more papers presented by the leading experts and the reminiscences of circus professionals. The overall quality of the presentations has drawn the increasing attention of academics, who commonly rely upon the work of society members in their studies. Annual dues in the CHS has remained at a stable and almost unbelievably reasonable \$19.00 for several years. Our annual cash flow in 1995 was about \$46,000, an over 50 fold increase.

Premature autopsies have been performed on the American circus as early as 1872. Recent remarks in some quarters would seem to forecast a similar premature demise of organizations such as the Circus Historical Society; however, I would argue that comparison of the above data reflect a wholly and entirely positive future for the CHS.



Bob Sabia, Irv Mohler, CWM clown Bill Machtel and Ernest Albrecht enjoy lunch in the Bengal Barbecue. Fred Pfening, Jr. photo.

There is no doubt that the singular personal dedication of Fred D. Pfening, Jr. has acted as both a stabilizing rudder and guiding star for navigation during both good and troubled times. The *Bandwagon* is the flagship of the CHS and it has charted a high standard. It is our fervent hope that Fred meet the challenges that editing and composition of the magazine bring for many more years.

I am personally most concerned about the contributions to our journal. With personal guilt that I hopefully share with others, we rely upon the all too frequent, albeit willing, contributions of a select core of writers to fill the pages of *Bandwagon*. In all fairness and concern for the future, more of us need to take pen in hand or apply fingers to the word processor. As a past contributor, I can assure you that there is a great satisfaction to see one's name and efforts in print in *Bandwagon*. The staff of Circus World Museum and those of other specialized circus and local history institutions exist to support your research efforts. If you think you need a personal collection to accomplish writing, reflect upon the reams of Kansas circus history which Orin King has shared with us simply by mining local resources. There are also many members within the organization who would willingly offer you their support and guidance if called upon.

Another area of concern is the legal and organizational status of the CHS. The corporate status of the organization needs to be updated to conform to current tax laws. To that end, Vice-President Richard J. Reynolds III has accepted an invitation to lead the effort to reincorporate the CHS as a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation and to update and revise the CHS constitution and by laws, bringing them into conformance with current practice and policy.

In lieu of asking what the other members or CHS officers are doing about memberships, I urge members to each individually shoulder some of the burden of succession by taking personal initiative to seek new members. Nothing works better than your personal endorsement and encouragement when recruiting new members. Membership forms are readily available from the Secretary-Treasurer. A brochure advocating the benefits of CHS membership will soon be available. If you have enjoyed your CHS participation, please share the enriching experience with others through your own proactive membership initiatives.

The greatest challenge most organizations face is finances. Prudent money management, members' generous support of the CHS benefit auctions and unpublicized but significant personal sacrifice by the Editor have enabled the Circus Historical Society to enjoy a solid financial foundation. The financial security of the Society has been further assured by a substantial bequest from the estate of late CHS member Edith "Shrimp" Johnston. Ms. Johnston willed a percentage of her estate to the Society which at the present time totals \$50,000. Please be aware that costs are always increasing, paper in particular, but that these increased expenses have not been passed along to the membership. The Johnston windfall has been invested to provide immediate financial benefit to the CHS treasury. We are also pleased to announce that a \$500 memorial in the name of Bob Parkinson, a past President of the CHS, has been given to the society by Marilyn Parkinson.

We are considering further improvement of *Bandwagon* quality, creation and publication of an index of the society's journal to make the information contained therein more accessible, and other possible applications for a portion of the funds. Regardless of how these funds are utilized or invested, we can assure you that it will be to continue the preservation and perpetuation of circus history and to fulfill the mission of the Society.

In summary, the existence and future of the Circus Historical Society as a viable organization is secure. Who will constitute it, what form and quality the journal will embody and what format the conventions will assume are largely in the hands of you, the membership, and your willingness to participate.



### A Circus Pass

The Hagenbeck-Wallace circus came to my home of Uniontown, Pennsylvania almost every year, always in May. The advance car arrived three weeks ahead of the circus which was going to exhibit on Monday, May 11, 1914. The local livery stable that hired out rigs and buggies to circuses was near my dad's restaurant. Advance crews of circuses, carnivals or road shows would often eat at our place.

The Wallace circus bill crew plastered all of the windows as well as the wall in dad's dining room. The lithographer gave dad general admission passes. As the crew was leaving to rejoin the advance car sitting on a siding near the railroad depot, the car manager gave mother two long passes good for reserved numbered seats in the grandstand.

When the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus arrived early on Sunday morning I was at home getting into my clothes to go to Sunday school and then to morning church service. On the way to church something tempted me as I made a detour, and I headed for the circus grounds. Reaching the grounds I was soon doing what the other kids were doing, gawking into the closed animal cages and anything that was not covered. A man on the show asked if I wanted to earn a pass to the big show. I did not hesitate to tell the kid worker, sure I wanted to work for a pass. After he had picked up other kids we were ordered over to where they were getting ready to put up the big tent. We were turned over to another man, who had a bunch of kids spreading the big top canvas. He took our caps, so that we would not stray. He also gave each of us a piece of colored paper. We were told that it was not a pass. We would get that later. He did not say how much later. We ran over the canvas and joined the other boys to shake out the tent toward the stake line.

Later they pulled the canvas about a third of the way up the huge center poles. The kids started down one side raising side poles as the men were putting in the quarter poles. Other kids were unloading the jack wagon and carrying them into the big top. Another man was spotting the jacks. After that we moved to the stringer wagon. We unloaded them and carried them into the big top. Then we

# THE CIRCUS STEWARD

## Part III

By John M. Staley

were taken to another wagon, this time in the big top. It contained the blue planks. We stacked them in front of a row of quarter poles.

It was getting near noon. My once-clean clothes were now covered with dirt and dust. I started to worry about the reception awaiting me at home. I was also getting tired and hungry.

A short time later we were all taken outside and formed into a single line. The boss man gave us back our caps and a different piece of colored paper. We were told to come back the next morning around seven to get our passes. When it came to my turn I told the man I had to go to school. He said that it was not his worry. So with the piece of paper I started home. The closer I got the more scared I became.

When I got home mother, dad and my brother Ernest were seated at the dining room table having Sunday dinner. Dad quickly hustled me up to the bath room. After taking off all the dirty clothes he turned me over on his knees and gave me a darn hard spanking. Then he put me in the bath tub. When I got out of the tub I was told to put on my night clothes and go to bed without anything to eat.

I did not go back the next day to claim my pass. Nor was I allowed to go to the circus using the passes we had received from the billposters.

### The Bug Man

There were two circus grounds in Uniontown.

One was out of the city limits, a good mile and a half from downtown. Any circus that carried dancing girls and gambling in its side show used that show grounds. The other lot was within walking distance of downtown. This lot was used by both carnivals and circuses, being so near town.

Since being knee high to a pup I had been a circus fan. That afternoon I had been to the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus. I don't remember the year, but it was the early 1910s. With other kids my age I roamed around the many tents trying to see what each contained, dreaming that I might see some of the circus stars. I ended my tour on the midway by taking a gander at the many grotesquely painted pictures on the side show banner line.

I knew I should have been on my way home a long time before as I meandered toward the end of the midway. My day dreams were interpreted by a man who was tying strings around the necks of chameleons. He said, "hey kid will you get me some green cord." I said sure. He then gave

The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus midway in 1914. Circus World Museum collection.





me a dime for the two balls of cord. Since the show grounds were out in the sticks there were no stores nearby, I had to walk the entire mile and half before I found a racket store that had the green cord.

On my way back to the circus grounds I knew for sure the man would give me one of the chameleons after he trusted me with a dime. Getting near the show grounds the circus callopie started to give its evening concert. Most shows would keep a banked fire in the boiler of the callopie during the day. About an hour before the big show doors would open they started tooting on the callopie to let the natives know that there was a circus in town.

The circus grounds this day was atop a very steep, long hill. The street was not paved; it was yellow clay. I had known of a circus or two that after a hard rain would have to use hook rope teams of horses and elephants to get the wagons down the hill.

I was darn tired after the long walk and up the hill. After I found the man who had sent me to town, I gave him the green cord. He said for me to follow him, which I did. He guided me to a blow-off board that had not been taken down after the afternoon performance. Upon reaching the stand he told me to drink all the root beer I wanted, that it would not cost me one penny. It was almost impossible to drink any amount of the root beer as it was mostly fine chipped ice. By this time I was way down in the dumps, as I knew for sure I would be given one of the "bugs" on the green board.

All the way home I kept wondering what sort of a reception would greet me from mother and dad. It had already gotten dark and I could hear the colored side show band way off in the distance. But it was not any, darker than I felt as each step brought me closer to home, sweet home.

I presume most circuses had blow-off boards to take care of the crowds coming from the big show. They were placed at the far end of the midway, some distance from the other concession stands. They consisted of two boards, one by ten feet in width and about ten to twelve feet in length. The boards rested upon tall wooden jacks. The front and top were covered with white oil cloth. A large wooden cask had been sawed through the center making two barrels. Each barrel had heavy handles bolted to each side. They always carried one water pail to rinse the glasses. They never bothered or had time to change the water. The other part of the equipment was the

glass box. It had partitioned sections for about thirty six glasses. Those glasses today would be a show piece on a shelf in any home. They were about eight or nine inches tall, extra thick with false bottoms. I doubt if they held eight ounces of liquid. The price in those days was five cents for all you wanted, which was hard to do as it was almost all thin shaved ice. When he got busy the operator rarely rinsed the glasses. He just threw out what remained in the glass and made a pretense at rinsing.

### Black Cough Drops

Sid Ruben, boss butcher or concession manager of Ringling Bros. Shows, was more a father to me than a boss. In 1918 I was a youngster of a little past sweet seventeen and was always getting into trouble around the candy stands. This time I was shooting craps between the afternoon and the night performance when I should of been bagging peanuts for the night show.

It was during the month of August. The circus was exhibiting through the states of Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa and Kansas. It seemed every day was hotter than the one before. It must of been at least a hundred in the shade, never a drop of rain or a even a cloud. The big top was not air conditioned. Still the circus was getting large crowds afternoon and night.

I thought Sid Ruben had forgotten about the crap game, but that was wishful thinking. He put me in jail for two weeks. I still had to do all the chinese labor same as the other candy butchers.

The menagerie candy stand on Forepaugh-Sells around 1900. The Smith Brothers black cough drops were advertised. Pfening Archives.

Instead of selling peanuts or pop corn, then later ice cream Sid had a big surprise for me.

For the two week jail sentence I was given the "x" on the two other items, the Smith Brothers black cough drops and the joke books.

You can you imagine people buying cough drops in all the heat or joke books on their way out of the big top. I'll never forget one of the jokes in my spell, "the heats in tents." You can rest assured I never shot crap again when there was work to do.

### Two Circus Goliaths Combine

The merging of the two giants, Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros., in late fall of 1918 sounded the death knell for many old time performers and working men from both shows. It uprooted long-time friends, families and established homes. The Ringling circus was the most affected by the combining.

The Ringling Bros. Circus was forced to close in Waycross, Georgia early in the fall of 1918 due to the influenza epidemic. Starting in Charleston, South Carolina the circus was plagued by the flu scare. The farther south the circus ventured the worse it got. In every town the circus was quarantined. The town folks were not allowed on the circus grounds. In a few towns that did not quarantine the circus people were too scared to come near the lot. So after cancelations in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida Charles Ringling, who was the general manager of the show, placed a notice on the front door of the cook house in Jacksonville, Florida which stated the circus would close in Waycross and en-train to the Barnum winter quarters





in Bridgeport, Connecticut instead of the quarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The notice also said that any employees could ride the show trains to New York City or Bridgeport free of charge. The Ringling circus remained for three days in Waycross for the circus people to decide where they would go.

Barnum & Bailey was having the same trouble in Texas. A week after the Ringling closing John Ringling, general manager of the Barnum circus, put up a closing notice. When the Barnum circus reached Bridgeport it found the Ringling crew in full charge. Then the fun started. It did not take much to start a fist fight, even among some of the bosses.

The first two or three weeks after both circuses had been bedded down for the winter the main office lights were on twenty four hours each day as a continuous stream of executives and heads of the departments went into the office trying to save their jobs. The office was a pathetic scene each day with the men not knowing if they had a job for the next season. John and Charles Ringling were in the office at all hours of the day and night. It was a heart breaking job for them to cull out the men and women they would not need for the new combined circus when it hit the road in 1919. Many of the employees had been on the Ringling and the Barnum circuses for many years.

The unlucky group was cast aside without any compensation for all their years of faithful service. To some it meant breaking up homes and moving to the new quarters of the circus in Bridgeport. To others it meant having to find new employment on another circus. I will give the Ringling brothers their just due. They tried to place all their employees, even to the extent of putting on assistant superintendents where they really were not needed. The Ringling men had a rough time as most of them had homes in Baraboo, which they had to sell or rent. They also had to move their families and belongings to Bridgeport with no moving expenses from the circus. At the time this was taking place in 1919 we had no idea that in eight short years we would have to follow the same routine all over again and move to Sarasota, Florida at the close of the 1927 circus season.



Special lithograph used by the combined Ringling and Barnum circus in 1919. Pfening Archives.

### The Grand Street Parade

Be on time to see the magnificent free street parade every morning at ten a. m., rain or shine. The longest, over two miles in length, most gala golden glittering, colossal, most dazzling, most gorgeous cavalcade ever seen in this country. The most glorious demonstration ever beheld in any age. More actual wealth, splendor, glorious sights than ever before witnessed free. The largest and most attractive combination on earth with its marvelous aggregation of living wild beasts, sumptuous tableau wagons with imported wood carvings see the greatest free street parade ever covered with pure gold leaf. Don't fail to see the greatest free street parade ever seen on earth.

The above is not a Ringling-Barnum press agent's dream. Part of it was used by circuses to advertise their street parades around the turn of the century.

Now I will go from one extreme to the other. The time is 1919. The place is Brooklyn, New York on April 27. In the cook house the subject is the street parade to be given the following morning. This was the year that the two giants of the circus world combined. The cook house was operated by Ollie Webb. Two thirds of the seasoned men were from the Ringling circus as was Webb. The other third were Barnum & Bailey cook house men.

Eight men were picked to appear in parade from the long end or working-men's side of the dining tent. Four were selected from the short side, or performer's side of the dining tent. As I was a Barnum man I was given the nod to make parade. No Ringling men had to make parade.

We were told that the pay for making parade would be three dollars a week. But they forgot to mention that if we only made one parade in a given week the pay would be fifty cents.

The twelve men in the cook house section were draped in heavy medieval costumes. The pants and coat were heavy enough to stand any blizzard. It would be the first time that year the uniforms would be used. They stank to high heaven. We wore a heavy breast plate, medieval armor helmet and leather riding boots. To

finish out our costumes we had a long wooden staff with a spear head attached.

Our mounts were heavy duty baggage horses. They had been let out to pasture since the show closed the prior fall. It seemed that they were not saddle broken, as they always wanted to go their own way. It was a battle between man and beast. The big payoff was that not one of the twelve cook-house men had ever ridden a horse until the morning of the parade in Brooklyn.

The Brooklyn and Philadelphia parade routes were among the longest of the season. They each must have been at least three hours long. It felt like more. After I came back from parade I did not have any desire to sit.

After making the Brooklyn parade some of us realized it was ridiculous, more so for the four riders from the short end. The cook house unit was near the end of the parade. After getting back to the lot we rode our horses to the horse tent. We then had to walk back to the wardrobe tent to change clothes, then to the cook house. Many a time the cook house would be six to ten blocks from the big top, sometimes further. By the time we reached the dining tent our tables had already been taken care of by another waiter. When we returned from parade we had to clean off the tables and set them up for dinner.

Fred Bradna was parade marshal of the cook house unit. We were getting lined up for the parade in Washington, D. C., another three or four hour affair. While waiting for the parade to start, the cookhouse men had a council of war. I suggested that this would be our last parade, whether it meant our jobs or not.

When we returned to the circus



grounds after making parade we went directly to Grant Whittington, head waiter on the performers' side of the dining tent. I told him what we had talked about before the parade. He did not say yes or no at that time. Later as we were eating dinner Grant came over to my band table and said that Webb fully agreed with us, and if we were not satisfied and did not want to make the parade, it was okay with him. That was the last parade for the cook house men.

### Old Time Circus Hammer Gangs

The cook house department on the Ringling-Barnum circus had three sledge hammer gangs. The big gang consisted of eight to twelve men, mostly old timers. They drove more than half of the stakes around the large dining tent. The second gang was called the "hospital gang." With the exception of one or two men they were all first of Mays. The third gang were the blacks who drove the stakes around the kitchen and the colored dining tent.

In the 1920s we did not know what an iron stake was around the cook house. Ollie Webb believed in wood stakes no matter how hard the ground. We had a man with each gang use a starting bar to make holes for the stakes. Sometimes a man with a pail of water had to soften the ground for the starting bar. It was years later that we had a complete set of iron stakes as well as a set of wooden stakes.

I believed that the average person watching the hammer gangs at work had the wrong perception of them. The only man who put any real weight behind his hammer was the starter. While the stake was placed in the hole it was held by another man. He would give the stake four or five heavy swings with his hammer, then the men would rotate as starters. That way one person didn't do all the heavy work.

After the stake was started each of the men in the gang would take his turn, moving clockwise until the stake was in the ground to its proper depth. I have time after time convinced skeptical people that the men were not throwing all their weight behind each swing. If they had they would have tired themselves out in no time. The men acted the same in principal as a rivet machine. It was not weight alone



A hammer gang on Ringling Bros. in the 1890s. Pfening Archives.

that put the stake into the ground. It was the continuous pounding. All the men did was swing their hammers over their shoulders and make contact with the stake.

It seemed as though I was always explaining to new men that a sledge hammer was not a toy, but a dangerous piece of steel, same as a loaded revolver, not to be played with at any time. One misplaced swing of the hammer could put a person in the hospital, cripple him for life, or put an eye out by a sliver of steel from the hammer flying in the air or by hitting another hammer head.

I have told many a time of the souvenir I received years ago which until this day gives me trouble. We were driving iron stakes on the lake front in Grant Park, Chicago. As each man hit the iron stake it would shimmy from side to side. You had to keep your eyes on the iron stake, not the man behind you as your swing should be coming down as the man ahead pulled his hammer from the stake. But the man ahead of me pulled his hammer too slowly. My hammer was already coming down, so the man behind me saw that there would be steel flying. So he threw the end of his hammer at mine, throwing me off balance. It saved me from falling onto the iron stake, which would have caused me to be hit by one of the hammers. To this day I carry the trade mark on my left ankle and my big toe. The nail has always been ugly. Even though I had it removed it did not do any good.

The black hammer gangs on the big top always had a clown, particularly if he had a big audience. He would skip his turn or not swing, just throw his hammer on the stake to confuse the man behind. At other times he would

put his hammer on the stake and dare someone hit it or put his hand on top of the stake. That practice was always frowned upon at the cookhouse. The sledge hammers used now on circuses weigh from eight to ten pounds for "tack" hammer to sixteen pounds for regulation hammers. Some hammers were designed differently than others. In the cook house all our sledge hammers were blunt and flat at both ends.

Almost all the employees in the cook house with the exception of the cook, grocerman, butcher and bakers were graduates of the "hospital" gang. The job of breaking in all the new men fell into my lap. Not all men turned out to be good hammer men. Some never got out of the habit of being a wood chopper. Should one of these men ever miss a stake the force would almost pull his head away from his body and he could get hurt.

We would hold school during the afternoon between dinner and supper. We would all meet at No. 8 wagon, which was the cook house canvas and pole wagon in which the wooden stakes were loaded as well as the stake puller. One man would use the starting bar, making about twelve holes, depending on the number of recruits. Another man would then put in the wood stakes. Each of the new men was lined up in front of the stakes. He then would try his luck at hitting the stake. After it was driven into the ground to the normal depth, it was pulled up by the hand stake puller. The man then went to another stake. They would practice for about one hour each afternoon until they were eligible to move into the "hospital gang." Some never got out of the number two gang, while others made the big gang right off the jump.

Using iron stakes divided the boys from the men, including even the old timers. After the first time around for each of the men, the hammers would increase in speed with each rotation. The iron stake would shiver as each hammer hit the top. With all the pounding the stake would jump from side to side, which the old timers were wont to miss at times.

When we used iron stakes the stake and chain man on the cook house put in new oak handles each and every day.



**Mike Martin's**

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- 7). "MERLE & R/B BAND" - COLUMBIA 1941
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